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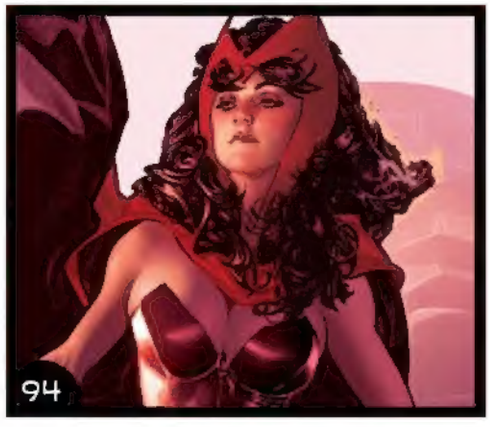

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Mission: Improbable is a new, four-part crossover event beginning this March in *Archer & Armstrong* #18 and *Bloodshot And H.A.R.D. Corps* #20! Each issue will feature one of four interlocking Pullbox Exclusive Variants – reserved exclusively for comic shop subscribers – by artist Jorge Molina, which when put together will look a lot like this!

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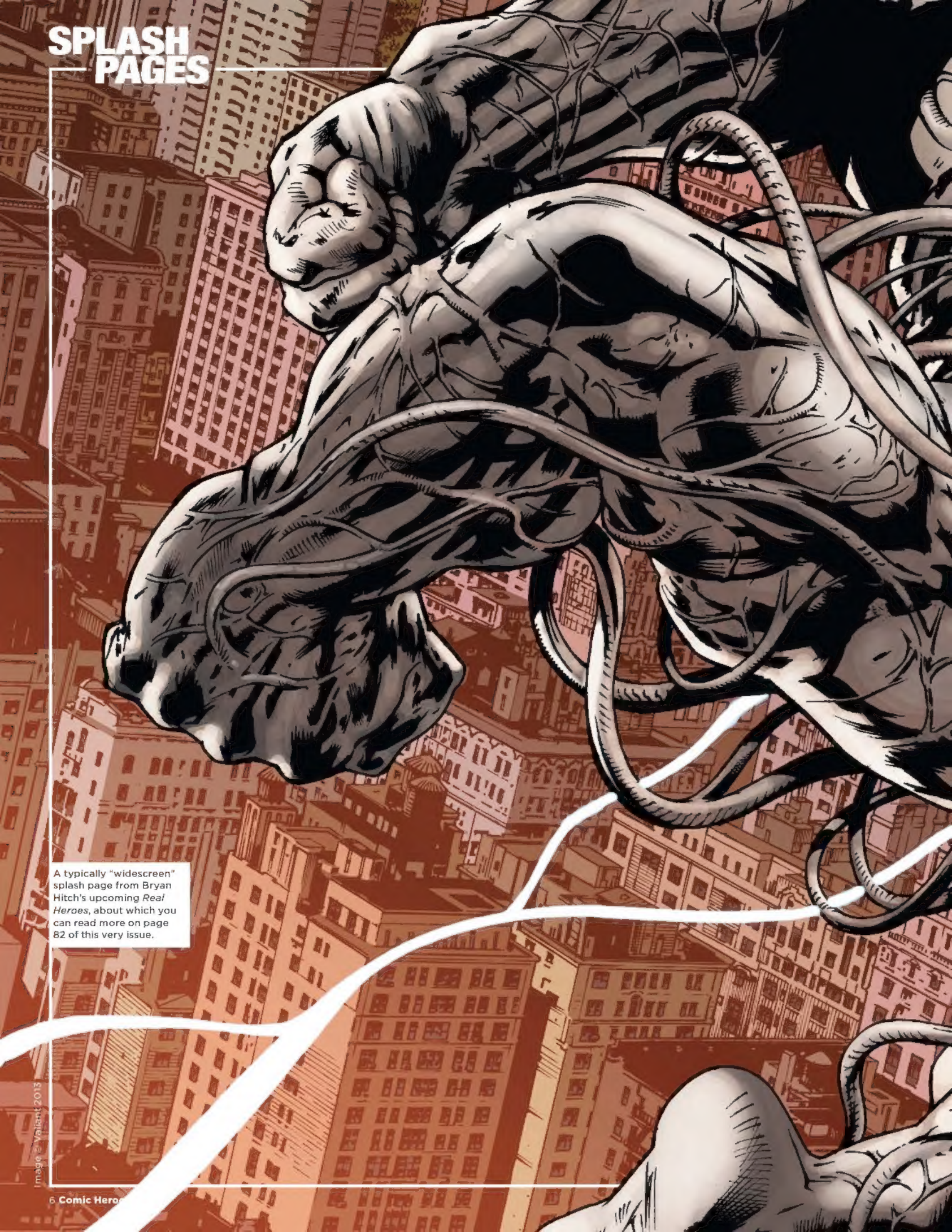


A typically "widescreen" splash page from Bryan Hitch's upcoming *Real Heroes*, about which you can read more on page 82 of this very issue.

Image © Valiant 2013

Flame on! A fiery, unlettered preview spread from Marvel's *All-New Invaders* #1, art by Steve Pugh.

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

Warriors Reborn

Their name is associated with death, destruction and disgrace, but can the New Warriors find redemption with a fresh line-up? Writer Chris Yost and artist Marcus To talk to **David West**

The New Warriors earned their place in the annals of comic book infamy in 2006, when their botched attempt to capture the nuclear-powered villain Nitro resulted in the death of more than 600 civilians and most of the team, sparking off Marvel's Civil War in the process. In February artist Marcus To and writer Chris Yost will bring together a fresh roster of young heroes under the New Warriors banner to see if the team can recapture its former glory.

The line-up includes original founding members Speedball and Justice, who are joined by the latest Nova, Sam Alexander, alongside Kaine, in the guise of the Scarlet Spider, and a batch of fresh faces: Water Snake, Haechi, Hummingbird and Sun Girl.

"Each character by design brings something obviously different," says Yost about the roster. "Each comes from a different subset of the Marvel Universe, be it mutant, Inhuman, super-human, magic, alien, human, Atlantean or clone. But each has their own distinct voice and personality. Sun Girl is an idealist. Hummingbird brings enthusiasm. Water Snake brings a badass edge and determination. Haechi brings caution, despite being one of the most powerful members of the team, and Scarlet Spider brings positivity and charm. Or maybe not..."

"I see Scarlet Spider as someone who has good in him, he just needs the chance to show it," says To, to which Yost adds, "He wants to atone for his past sins but, at the same time, he knows he's pretty much a monster. Like the Hulk, he just wants to be left alone."

A cursory glance at the team reveals that these are amongst the youngest heroes in the Marvel Universe, just as the original New Warriors were once upon a time. "Youthfulness is very important to the New Warriors. The look and aesthetic in general is geared towards a younger audience and they should feel like they can relate to the characters in this book," says To.

"Agreed, young heroes are the book's reason to be," confirms Yost. "They're not Power Pack, these aren't, for the most part, high schoolers but they're very young adults – except Nova and everyone gives him crap about it. But at the same time, some of these characters aren't as old as you might think. It's more of a college aged vibe."

Justice returns to the New Warriors after stints with the Avengers, his association with The Initiative and role at the Avengers Academy. The telekinetic hero will be taking the reins of the team once led by his friend Night Thrasher. "Justice is the leader, for sure," says To. "He's got some doubts about his qualifications, and even if the Warriors should still exist given its history. But he'll have his angel and devil on his shoulders – Sun Girl and Scarlet Spider. They have very different opinions on how things should go, and Justice will have to deal with it all."

Any new group will invariably go through growing pains. Asked who will have the biggest problems adapting, the creators are of one mind. "Scarlet Spider is my bet," says Marcus. "That's a safe bet," says Yost. "Even Faira Sar Namora, the Water Snake, gets teamwork. She's a soldier, and soldiers watch each other's backs."

However, disciplined warrior or not, the Atlantean still has her own agenda.

"This is big, world-saving adventure, with a high dosage of fun"

"Water Snake has one goal in life: find Namorita and bring her back to Atlantis," says Yost. "Everything else is an annoyance."

But that's not to say the series will be all interpersonal conflict and angst by any means. "This is, or will come to be, a book where even if these characters weren't out saving the world, they'd hang out with each other anyway. This is big, world-saving adventure, with a high dosage of fun," says Yost.

The first Nova, Richard Rider, was one of the original New Warriors but now that Rich is missing in action, the mantle of Nova has been passed on to Sam Alexander. Unfortunately for the new kid in the helmet, his colleagues Speedball and Justice fought alongside his predecessor, who left big shoes to fill. "Oh yes," says Yost with enthusiasm, "Nova is going to get hazed bad."

The challenge that brings the heroes together is the reappearance of the beings known as The Evolutionaries. "The Evos once tangled with the X-Men, desperate to protect mutant-kind by killing every human on the planet," says To. "They've had a change in their world view and their goals are different. Genocidal, but different."

While the team members may have to adjust to working together, that shouldn't be a big problem for To and Yost as the duo previously teamed up on *Red Robin* for DC. "I've been itching to work with him again ever since," says To. "I love his scripts – they really help showcase what I can do. *New Warriors* excited me because I love working on a book with a young team dynamic. The drama is so much higher with people who don't have the experience to rely on when confronted with problems."

Asked what To brings to the project, Yost replies, "On *Red Robin*, every page he turned in exceeded what was in both the script and my head. I couldn't be more excited to have him on the book. And his fight scenes are badass."

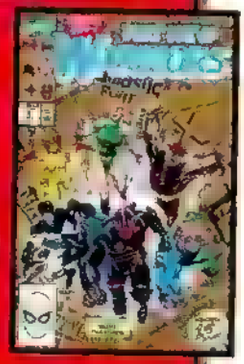
New Warriors *launches in February*

OLD WARRIORS

A brief retrospective of the Not-So-New Warriors...

First appearance: *Thor* #411 (1989)

Original roster: Firestar, Marvel Boy, Namorita, Night Thrasher, Nova (Richard Rider variety), Speedball



First run of their own title: July 1990

Last issue of the first run: September 1996

New members picked up during that time: Silhouette, Darkhawk, Rage, Hindsight Lad, Bandit, Turbo, Powerpax, Scarlet Spider, Helix, Timeslip

Volume 2: October 1999 – July 2000 (cancelled)

Roster: Namorita, Nova, Speedball, Turbo, Bolt, Aegis

MIA: A flashback in *The Avengers Initiative* reveals that Slapstick and Ultra Girl were New Warriors in the mid-volume void.

Volume 3: August 2005 – February 2006 (miniseries)

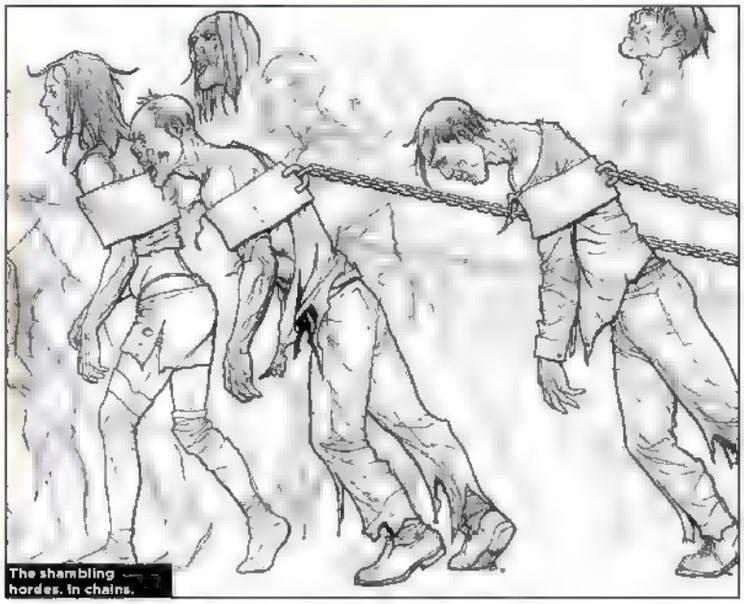
Roster: Namorita, Night Thrasher, Nova, Speedball, Microbe, Debris

Volume 4: August 2007 – March 2009 (cancelled)

Roster: Night Thrasher, Blackwing, Decibel, Longstrike, Phaser, Ripcord, Skybolt, Tekpest, Wondra, Renascence

Zombies: bug-eyed and loose of neck.

It all gets a bit bloody in the Big Apple.



The shambling hordes, in chains.

Drawn Of The Dead

Zombie godfather George A Romero tells **Stephen Jewell** why he's doing a reverse-Kirkman

Just as its spin-off of Stephen King's *Dark Tower* opus hits the home straight, the House Of Ideas has signed up another master of horror. Beginning this month, *Empire Of The Dead* finds *Night Of The Living Dead* director George A Romero making his first foray into comics at the ripe old age of 73, although the New York-born filmmaker has long been a fan.

"I grew up on the old EC books and really loved them, and then I got to appreciate everything Marvel had to offer later on," he recalls. "You might remember *Creepshow*, a film Stephen King wrote that I directed in 1982. That was an appreciation of the way comics can make you feel and the whole idea of having fun by being scared."

An ardent zombie fan, Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso approached Romero to see if he would be interested in turning his hand to comics. "I told him that I'd been working on a story for a while," says Romero. "So the timing with Axel was perfect. He liked what we had in mind, and here we are."

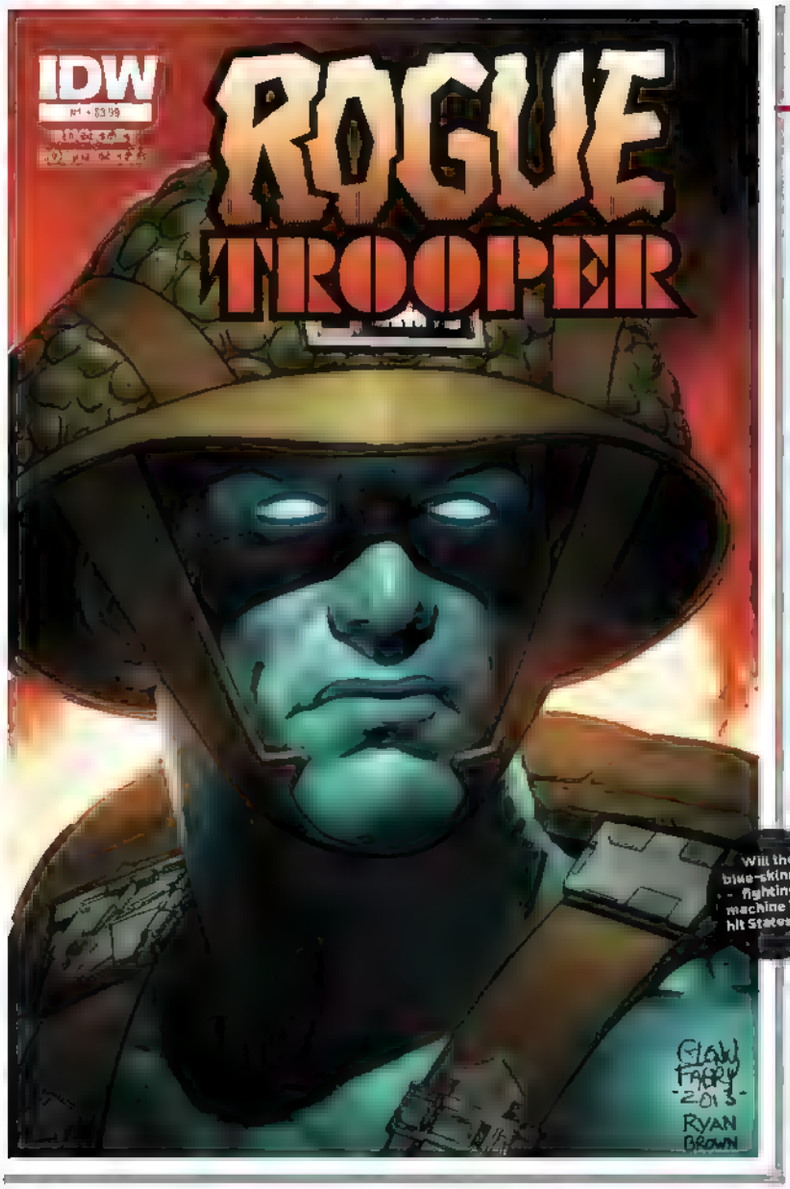
The series chronicles the zombies getting smarter and the introduction of a deadly new predator that also has a hankering for human flesh. However, Romero refuses to confirm whether it echoes the themes of his similarly-titled movies, such as *Dawn Of The Dead* and *Day Of The Dead*. "I let you and your readers interpret those themes and draw your own conclusions. But one of the things that really interests me is that in the middle of all hell breaking loose, when times are hard and people are fighting for survival, so many of the humans in the story are still greedy, still infatuated by power and still just looking out for themselves."

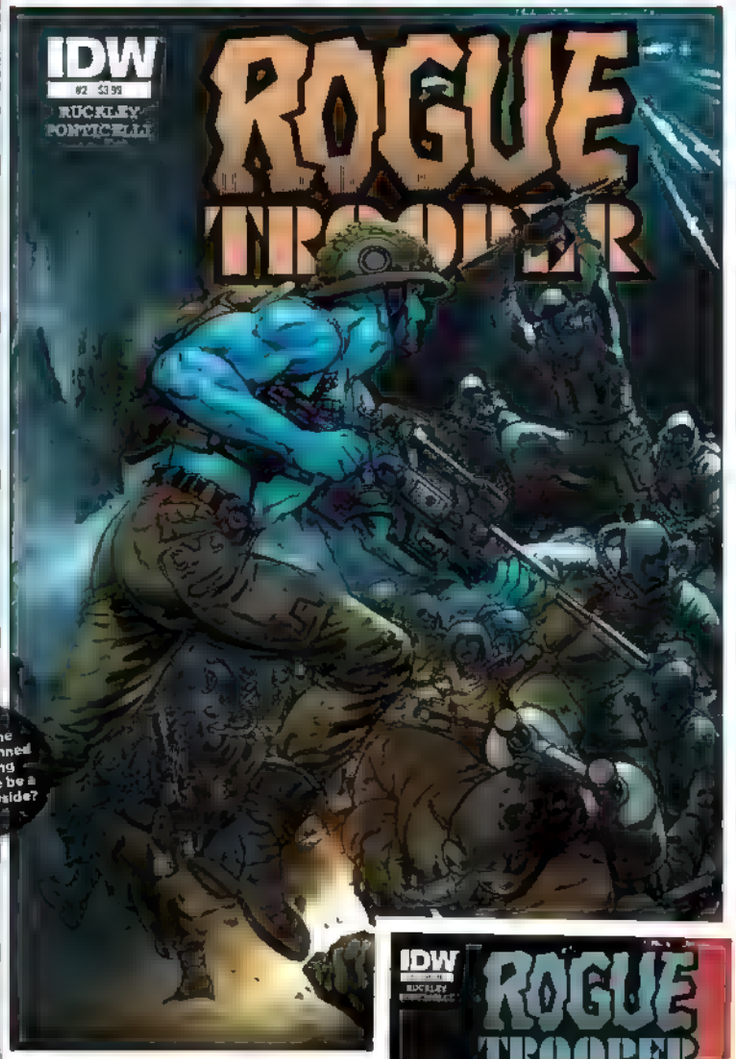
After dealing with the complicated logistics of making a feature film for several decades now, Romero is relieved to pass such decisions onto artist Alex Maleev (*Daredevil, Moon Knight*). "Things like make-up are his problem now," he laughs. "The difference is that when I'm writing a movie, I need to take a lot of practical things into consideration such as budgets, locations and actors. The 'now' of making a movie is part of the fun of making a movie. But when I'm working on a comic book, I don't have to be practical as I'm only limited by my imagination."

Empire Of The Dead was conceived as a 15-issue story, but will initially be released in a five-part burst. "Sure, the story could continue but let me finish working on this one first!" he declares, admitting that he would like to adapt the series for the screen at some stage. "I'd love to film it but, from the start, it was conceived as a comic book, and that's where my focus is right now." CH

***Empire Of The Dead** is out now*

"In the middle of all hell breaking loose, so many humans are still greedy"





Super Trooper

Stephen Jewell asks Brian Ruckley about going *Rogue*

After scouring the Cursed Earth in its *Judge Dredd* monthly, IDW will be exploring the even more ravaged environment of Nu-Earth for its next venture with *2000 AD*.

First introduced in 1981's *Prog 228*, blue-skinned Genetic Infantryman Rogue Trooper will next month become the second of Thargs numerous creations after Dredd to be reconfigured for the US market.

"It's not a complete re-imagining," says writer Brian Ruckley, best known for *The Godless World* series. "The original concept is so strong, it doesn't need major reworking, but a lot has happened – in both the real world and the world of comics – since those early strips, so a little bit of tweaking seemed in order. I've also added a few plot and character wrinkles of my own, which will hopefully keep things fresh and interesting for old-school *Rogue* readers."

CHIPS IN

Most importantly, Ruckley assures us that Rogue's trustee downloaded pals, Gunnar, Bagman and Helm, will be present and correct. "I wouldn't dream of messing around too much with the biochips," he insists. "They're central to the *Rogue* mythos."

Series creator Gerry Finley-Day was originally paired with *Watchmen* artist Dave Gibbons, but Ruckley is teaming up with *Dial H* artist Alberto Ponticelli. "He's doing a wonderful job of combining realism with energy and drama," says Ruckley. "And – this might sound trivial, but it really isn't – he's also incredibly good at drawing people in chem-suits! He makes them look real and convincing, which isn't easy."

Rogue Trooper is arguably a better candidate for American adaptation than a strip like *Strontium Dog*. "He's probably a little more widely known because of the videogames," says Ruckley. "There's the strength and clarity of the basic concept, while his mission is clear and resonant and accessible to any reader. And the visuals – Rogue himself and the toxic horror show that is Nu-Earth – are inherently striking and interesting stuff."

Beyond "action and heroism", Ruckley is reluctant to reveal too much about what to expect. "There'll be a fairly frank look at what war does to people, physically *and* psychologically," he says. "There'll be twists and turns that will hopefully keep readers on their toes, plus some fun future war-tech and sci-fi elements, but with a continuing focus on what made the original so strong: real people fighting a nasty war face-to-face. And Rogue himself being the coolest badass warrior, can make him!" CH

***Rogue Trooper** will be published by IDW later this year*

> **"I wouldn't dream of messing around too much with the biochips"**

The red, white and blue suit of Iron Patriot.

'Secret Avengers' relaunched line-up.

Spy Games

Stephen Jewell talks to Ales Kot about his two latest Marvel projects

After meshing real-world politics with sci-fi-flavoured espionage fiction in his creator-owned Image series *Zero*, Ales Kot is set to explore the murkier edges of the Marvel Universe when he relaunches *Secret Avengers* in March.

Kot describes the new-look book as James Bond meets *Arrested Development* and first arc "Unbreakable" takes place in space, in the air *and* on the ground.

Hawkeye, intriguingly, is described as "on the fringe of being there/not being there" but Spider-Woman will definitely be joining Black Widow, Coulson and Maria Hill in the covert division of Earth's Mightiest Heroes – who apparently have to juggle dealing with their own personal problems while combating a new shadowy threat.

"There's also a specific character that I'm not going to divulge but I'm very happy about them being in the book," reveals Kot, who is joined by artist Michael Walsh, who also drew *Zero*'s inaugural issue.

"We're going for something between what I'm doing with *Zero* and Hawkeye," says Kot. "There's humour but there's also genuine danger. And it's funny because Hawkeye isn't exactly the most responsible person, Spider-Woman has her own issues, and it's easy to go *Brazil* on a secret superhero team working for a massive spy agency. The absurdity of it is quite visible. The cast is efficient, yet all over the place – and that's wonderful for the story dynamics."

PATRIOT ACT

Also in March, Kot will take charge of *Iron Patriot*, chronicling the adventures of James Rhodes, Tony Stark's right-hand man. "I'm using a simple Shane Black/Mark Millar/Michael Bay action-thriller three-act structure that I then wring through my head," explains Kot. "It goes in different directions but it's kind of like a very classic mainstream action movie in the way that I'm approaching the writing."

> **"It's kind of like a very classic mainstream action movie"**

In contrast, Kot describes *Secret Avengers* as more of a layering process. "That's not to say that *Iron Patriot* doesn't have subtext as it totally does," he says. "But there are ways of layering two layers of subtext and ways of layering 10. I'm going for a few more layers with *Secret Avengers* because I want to play with something that has a larger overarching arc."

In *Secret Avengers* #1, two characters have a conversation that alludes to Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ozymandias*, the inspiration for *Watchmen*'s big bad of the same name. "That's partially me tipping my hat to *Breaking Bad*," he says. "But there's also an important storytelling reason. There's a history to the poem that people are not aware of – something I've also thrown into the mix – and it all benefits the story we're telling. At the same time, there's also a lot of quite explosive non-verbal action." CH

***Secret Avengers* #1 and *Iron Patriot* #1 are both out in March.**

The movie stays Cap A and Human Torch actor Chris Evans.

Snow Joke

Rob Power talks to *Snowpiercer* artist Jean-Marc Rochette

***Snowpiercer*, or *Le Transperceneige* in its native France, isn't exactly fun and games. Set on a giant train that circles a world that has been plunged into a new ice age, it's a gritty dystopia that will make you think twice about your morning commute.**

Created by French comic book legend Jacques Lob in the late '70s, *Snowpiercer* is a story of grim determination and the remnants of society tearing itself apart – so, perfect for the cinema, then.

"The story was simple and pure, as great stories often are," says artist Jean-Marc Rochette. "I also really love Kafka, and there is a little bit of Kafka in *Snowpiercer*."

In 1982 Jacques Lob started looking for a new artist to create *Snowpiercer*. His first choice, Alexis, died in 1977 after drawing 17 pages of the first version. Lob tried other artists, but eventually decided on Rochette – much to the young artist's surprise.

"This is strange because I was mostly an underground cartoonist, best known for *Edmond le Cochon*, a story like *Fritz The Cat*, and without any experience of realistic drawing," says Rochette.

"I learned to draw in a realistic way with *Snowpiercer*. My masters were Noel Sickles and Alex Toth; for me they were the best, and they're always the best..."

Rochette deployed his influences to devastating effect, creating a darkly compelling comic that resonated so hard with Korean filmmaker Bong Joon-Ho that he had to make it into a film. Although still yet to receive a UK or US release date (and with rumours that its US distributors plan to butcher it by 20 minutes), the film has already been a huge success in France and South Korea.

> **"The story was simple and pure, as great stories often are"**

"It was like a miracle, a kind of destiny," says Rochette of the news that *Snowpiercer* was to be reborn on screen. "I saw the film five times. For me, it is a masterpiece: the real *Snowpiercer* as a movie... and I think the book was like a try out for the movie, but sometimes some sketches are indispensable for big paintings..."

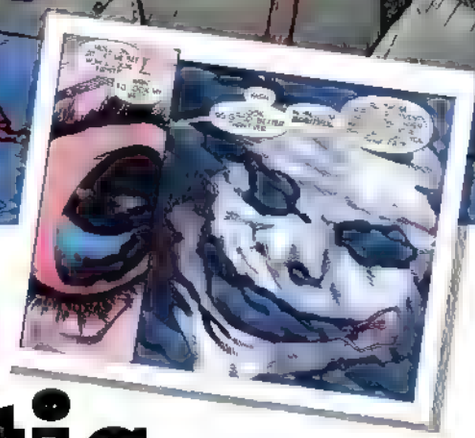
That those "sketches" from the book have ended up on film is actually a fitting conclusion to the *Snowpiercer* story, considering Rochette's approach to creating the look of the comic. "My visual influences were from movies: *Alphaville* by Jean-Luc Godard, and *The Trial Of Orson Welles*," he explains. "I wanted to show a pretty normal world, sad and grey like the suburbs of Paris occupied by Russian soldiers."

Although *Snowpiercer* creator Lob passed away in 1990, the film version – and a continuing story in comic-book form – is giving his legacy a whole new lease of life. "It was a very difficult decision because Lob didn't want a new story," concludes Rochette. "But after almost 20 years *Snowpiercer* was almost forgotten. It was the right choice: no film, no rebirth..." CH

Snowpiercer *the comic is reviewed on page 105, plus there's a six-page taster in this issue's Sidekick on page 146.*

Lois has dropped her 'damsel in distress' act.

Wading through ... comics' murkier waters.



The Journalist And The Lunatic

Lois Lane and Joker's Daughter are two very different DC characters; **David West** talks to the writer giving them both a New 52 makeover

In February, writer Marguerite Bennett shines a spotlight on two very different women in a pair of one-shot specials for DC. Lois Lane is a cornerstone of the DC Universe and a character inextricably linked to the Man of Steel, while crawling out of the darkest corners of Gotham comes Joker's Daughter, oozing bad intentions.

One of the biggest shifts in the character dynamics of the DC reboot was the decision to break the romantic link between Lois and Superman, an attraction which dates all the way back to *Action Comics* #1. For Bennett, this severing offers the opportunity to put a fresh perspective on Lois, one that's a far cry from the scheming pest of the '60s determined to expose Superman's secret identity.

"The New 52 eased the pressure to reconcile the interpretations of Lois Lane that were perhaps more influenced by their decades and writers than by her inherent personality," says Bennett. "I needn't try to equate a Lois Lane endlessly conspiring for Superman's affections with a Lois Lane who is capable, witty, bold, efficient and fearless as she operates as a journalist in a war-torn country."

The intrepid reporter starred in her own series that ran from 1958 until 1974, forever establishing her in the titular role of *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane*. But now the character, who was originally modelled on creator Jerry Siegel's wife Joanne, can shed that outdated appellation.

"I believe it sets Lois free," says Bennett. "The tag is a phrase, not an identity, and to reduce Lois to an extension of Superman in this day and age feels like prizing tradition over authenticity, continuity over growth. Lois and Superman are independent and whole. She will be who she is, with or without Superman as her romantic partner. I believe absolutely that they belong together and would be happiest and most fulfilled together, but to call Lois only 'Superman's Girlfriend' discredits all she's done and achieved."

Given her obvious passion for the character, it seems Bennett's biggest challenge comes from bumping up against the limits of what she can accomplish in a one-shot. "Every single issue you are battling the twin enemies of expectation and desire," she says. "Lois means so many different things to so many different people. How can one possibly do all those identities justice in a single issue? Ultimately, you have to trust your story and your character."

THE DEVIL'S CHILD

While Lois remains uncontaminated by the darkness she encounters, Joker's Daughter is unmistakably fetid with evil. Comparing her two leading ladies, Bennett says, "Lois is the human

"How long do you think you could wear the mask before it changed you?"

conscience of the superhuman world, the anchor in the storm. Joker's Daughter is the chance of the needful believer to touch the thing she adores."

Asked what tone she's going for in *Batman: Joker's Daughter*, Bennett – whose twitter tag is @EvilMarguerite – replies with almost unsettling fervour, "Oh, horror. Grisly and gristly, bristling with spores, oozing from sores, singsong and savage."

"JD's story is a story perversely, about faith," she says, warming to her theme. "She is the greedy believer, eager for the recognition and approval of her absent god. She found the Joker's vile face among the ruins beneath Gotham and believes that it came to her and her alone; that it chose her, that he chose her, that her life will have meaning and power through him. For a time it was enough to feel so exalted, so chosen... but it is not to last. She is no kin to him, has never even met him."

As much as Lois Lane's identity is tied up with Superman, is it possible for Joker's Daughter to step out from the shadow of the Clown Prince Of Crime?

"This struggle is actually pivotal to her one-shot," says Bennett. "How long do you think you could wear the Joker's mask before you tried to tear it free in a panic, your fingernails scrabbling against that wet, decaying flesh? How long do you think you could wear the mask before it changed you, rotted you, contaminated you, before it was no longer merely a mask, before it could no longer be removed at all? Tell me, please. I'd like to know."

***Batman: Joker's Daughter** emerges on 5 February before **Superman: Lois Lane** hits shelves on 26 February*

This Month's Cover

This month's cover (© Marvel) was created especially for *Comic Heroes* by artist Mike Perkins (*Captain America, House Of M, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*) with colours by Andy Troy. Subscribers to the paper version of *Comic Heroes* received a text-free cover. Subscribers to the digital edition of *Comic Heroes* have the option to see the cover text free. Some text-free covers are available from MyFavouriteMagazines.co.uk.

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Things that have fallen out of fashion (some for good reason):
Underpants over tights
Backgrounds in comic art by John Byrne
Hummable theme tunes for movie superheroes
Calling female superheroes 'girls'
Superhero pets
Treasury editions

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Even an android can cry.

Crowning Glory

Rob Williams talks to **Stephen Jewell** about reinventing the Royals

If Marvel had hired Julian Fellowes to script the latest *Captain America* blockbuster, you might end up with something like *The Royals: The Masters Of War*.

Written by sometime *Comic Heroes* scribe Rob Williams and drawn by *2000 AD*'s Simon Coleby, February's Vertigo six-parter casts the British monarchy in a very different light, portraying the larger-than-life regals as superhuman saviours who come to the nation's rescue after the outbreak of World War II.

But although it's easy – and frightening – to imagine Prince Harry transformed into a testosterone-fuelled caped crusader, the main characters are apparently not based upon any real-life blue-bloods. And while the author counts the original 1977 *Star Wars* as a pivotal inspiration, the suspect relationship between main character Henry and his noble sister Rose instead brings to mind the rather more seedy affair between Jaime and Cersei Lannister in *Game Of Thrones*.

"Henry, is a noble, good-hearted young man when we meet him, so think Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*," says Williams. "He wants to make a difference for the right reasons, and he has the Superman-style powers to do so, if only his father will allow him to get involved in the war. Rose is a little older and more emotionally mature. She's battling with her own telepathy and she also has a good heart. But Henry and Rose may be battling their own feelings towards one another too."

According to Williams, it's their older brother Arthur, the Prince of Wales, who steals the show. "He's a drunkard and a womaniser – a completely selfish shit – and he's very acerbic too," he explains. "He gets all the best lines and isn't at all happy about having to fight a commoner's war. And then there's the King and Queen. Mum's mad and dad's a sweet old dithering Richard Briers-type. He's more concerned with making sure the Palace doesn't get scratched by German bombs!"

Having recently brought sci-fi superhero epic *The Ten-Seconders* to a close in *2000 AD*, Williams believes that *The Royals* is closer in tone to *Cla$$War*, the Com.X alternate caped crusader tale with which he made his comic book debut in 2002.

"It's similar in terms of societal themes and also scale and widescreen imagery," he reasons. "*The Royals* is the most I've used that kind of classic, *The Authority*-style pacing, where the imagery of World War II allows for some hugely impressive double-page splashes and big action sequences.

"Simon Coleby delivers that side of things brilliantly as #1 opens with the type of action sequence Hollywood would die for. *The Royals* is the type of book where you know the artist has been cursing the writer throughout as it's very demanding artistically. There's no shortcuts here and Simon has put the scale, grandeur and horror of World War II on the page." CH

***The Royals: The Masters Of War** is published by Vertigo in February.*

> **"The imagery of World War II allows for some big action sequences"**

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Artist **Mike Perkins** has a licence to draw some top spy action...

I'LL FILE A GRIEVANCE WITH PILCHARD
RAVE
YOU WANT TO COMMIT CAREER SUICIDE BE MY GUEST
I WOULD REMIND YOU, HOWEVER THAT AS FAR AS ANYONE IN THE FIRM KNOWS YOU SUCCESSFULLY MADE CONTACT WITH ME LAST NIGHT

AND WE'RE OFF TO A GRAND START SAVING THE WORLD EVERY OTHER WEEK
Basildon would benefit from some Bond-style charm lessons...

AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT WILL ONLY GET YOU SENT BACK TO WHAT YOR MEN POST IT OLD MAN PLUCKED YOU FROM
WHY NOT STICK AROUND INSTEAD AND SEE THE INFAMOUS CHARLES BASILDON IN ACTION?

The comics medium wonderfully encompasses a multitude of categories. From your basic, mythical superhero through fantasy (dark, light, urban and adult) and space-faring science fiction epics... and yet, for me, the milieu I most prefer to read about and be involved in creatively is the spy genre.

Maybe it's the intrigue and mystery linked to the adventures or perhaps it's the sheer sense of scale one can plug into those escapades. The spy genus can encapsulate and enfold any other brand beneath its wings, going anywhere and running the gamut of literature, from crime to mystery to human interest to any of the other type of stories mentioned above. Being English I'm sure a lot of the desire to work on an espionage comic comes from being exposed to constant re-runs of the Bond films on any bank holiday when I was a child; a time when, as the day dragged on and there was little left to do, you found yourself in front of a TV set with three channels and a desire to see daring exploits, far off locales and gorgeous exotic birds... of *all* kinds.

SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

When I was at Crossgen, and itching to get back into pencilling, I was asked if I'd like to take on the sci fi title *Sigil*. I was tempted. I really wanted to re-establish myself as a penciller after spending three years inking *Ruse*... but I enjoyed being on that mystery title immensely. The camaraderie I shared with Butch Guice and the pure joy I received from inking his pencils was a hard thing to wilfully give up. So I found myself thinking about the kind of project I *would* leave *Ruse* for. I came up with the concept of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* in a flurry of activity that evening and presented it to the management at Crossgen. Mark Alessi, then boss at that now long gone comics firm, just didn't understand it. How could such an uncompromising dick be the main guy? I'm referring to Charles Basildon (the lead protagonist of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*), of course... not Mr Alessi. Perish the thought.

My superspy, the aforementioned Mr Basildon, was James Bond if he was real: self-centred, vain, cold hearted and a sexual predator. Only bestowed with the Basildon moniker when the name was passed on to him after his predecessor died or moved on... as he had done so many times previously and would continue to do so long into the future. It's as if Connery, Moore, Craig, et al, were not the same guy. They just passed along the same name to ensure that Britain's Greatest Spy was always a presence... a dark deterrent.

The popularity of the title, even during the downward spiral of Crossgen's dragged out demise, came as no surprise. It was fun and irreverent. It was a spy book. The kind of genre I would have been happy to be drawing for the rest of my career.

> **“My superspy was real: self-centred, vain, cold-hearted and a sexual predator”**

He's got the Midas Touch

Christopher Golden

Mike Mignola's right-hand man takes on a new partner in crime for a grave undertaking

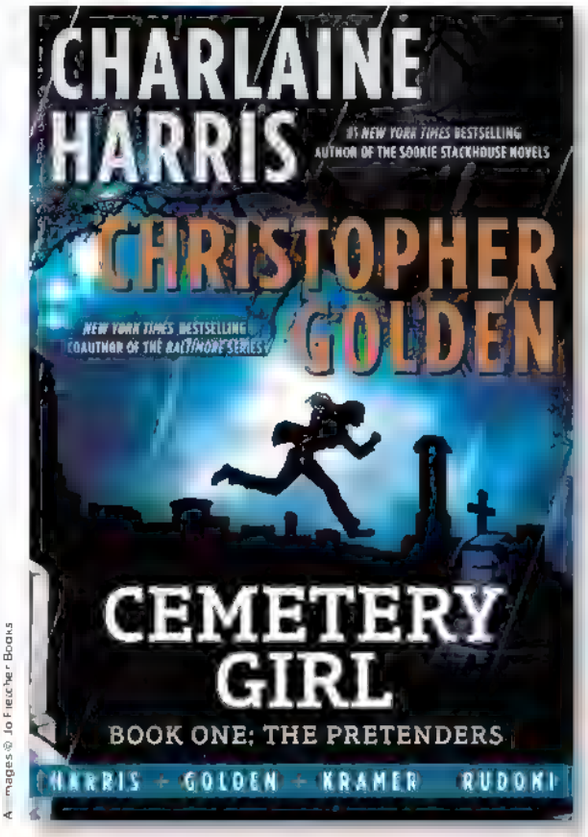
By Stephen Jewell

BORN MASSACHUSETTS, USA
HIGH BALTIMORE
NOW CEMETERY GIRL
MORE www.christophergolden.com

From Joe Hill to Max Brooks, many novelists have successfully turned their hand to comics after first making a name for themselves in prose fiction. But even though he is best known for teaming up with Mike Mignola on the Ben Stenbeck-illustrated spin-off of the pair's 2007 novel *Baltimore, Or The Steadfast Tin Soldier And The Vampire*, Christopher Golden's first comic book break actually occurred around the same time that his debut novel, 1994's *Of Saints And Shadows* hit stores in 1994. Hired by *Hellboy* publishers Dark Horse to script an adaptation of Joe R Lansdale's novel *The Drive In*, the project hit the skids after a contractual dispute and didn't see the light of day until it was resurrected by Avatar Press in 2006.

"The novels were something that was more my focus and then I did a bunch of different comics," says Golden, who has penned numerous titles over the past two decades including various Marvel and DC assignments and some of the early contributions to Dark Horse's *Buffy* line. "I pretty much stopped doing comics until *Baltimore* came out and that purely came about because we'd done the novel and it was like, 'We're not done with this yet but we've got to take a different approach'."

Currently balancing Baltimore with a *Sons Of Anarchy* six-parter for Boom! Studios and *Cemetery Girl*, his new graphic novel series with Sookie Stackhouse creator Charlaine Harris and artist Don Kramer, the Boston based scribe is relishing his return to comic books.

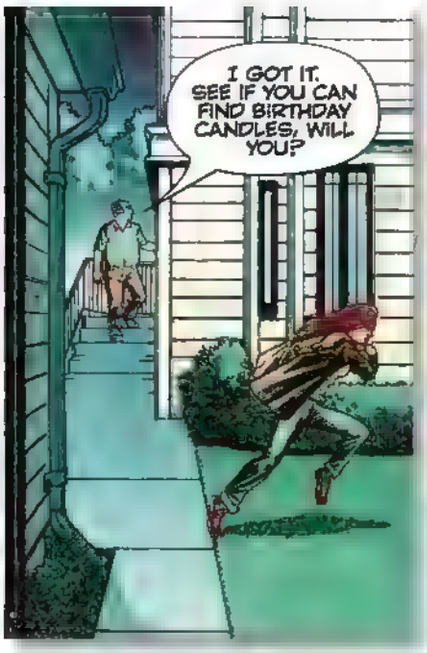

CHARLAINE HARRIS
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE SOOKIE STACKHOUSE NOVELS
CHRISTOPHER GOLDEN
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING COAUTHOR OF THE BALTIMORE SERIES
CEMETERY GIRL
BOOK ONE: THE PRETENDERS
HARRIS + GOLDEN + KRAMER RUDOMI

Images © Jo Fletcher Books

Comic Heroes: How did you come to team up with Charlaine Harris on *Cemetery Girl*?
Christopher Golden: "We were both at Dragoncon one year and were chatting over a drink. She said that she was frustrated because she had this idea that she wanted to do as a novel, but she didn't have the time to do it. I suggested doing it as a comic book. Six months later, she called me out of the blue and said, 'I'm thinking of doing it as a graphic novel, do you want to do it with me?' She'd never written a comic book before so she wanted to do something different. People have said, 'You must be doing all the writing,' but I'm not. We're absolutely splitting it. I write scenes, she writes scenes and we edit each other's work."

> **"Any amnesia story is really a story about identity"**

CH: *Cemetery Girl* centres on Calexa Rose Dunhill, who can apparently see dead people...
CG: "The story opens with a teenage girl being dumped and left for dead in a cemetery. She comes to without any memory and all she



knows is that someone tried to kill her. Her fear is that if she goes to the police they will just take her home – wherever home is – and whoever tried to kill her will simply finish the job. Temporarily she takes up residence in the crypt and ends up starting a new life for herself. She quickly realises when she attends a funeral that she can see the spirits of the dead once they depart their bodies. Then she sees a bunch of teenagers pretending to hold an occult ritual, which leads to a murder. What she finds in that case is that rather than the spirit rising, she takes on the memories of the dead person and the only way she can solve that issue is by solving the crime."

CH: A central protagonist who cannot remember who they are is a classic literary device...

CG: "It was so necessary for this. Any amnesia story is a really a story about identity and *Cemetery Girl* is exactly that. It's a story about self-definition and how we can reinvent ourselves and who we love."

CH: How does co-writing with Charlaine compare to your partnership with Mike Mignola?

CG: "My working relationship with Mike is totally different to how I've worked with any of the other people I've collaborated with. With the novels we've done, each one has been different. With *Baltimore*, Mike had about 85 per cent of that story in his head. I told him to write it down so he sent me notes about what he wanted to happen and I then filled in the empty spaces. With the comic, we get on the phone and discuss where we want the story to go. I then write the plot and send it to him. He gives me feedback and I write the script. We've been very pleased with the response because there are a lot of *Baltimore* readers who don't also read *Hellboy*, which means that they're reading it for itself as it doesn't exist in the same world."

CH: To date, Lord Baltimore's comic book escapades have taken place in a gap within the novel's narrative, so what happens when that journey finishes with this month's two-parter *Chapel Of Bones*?

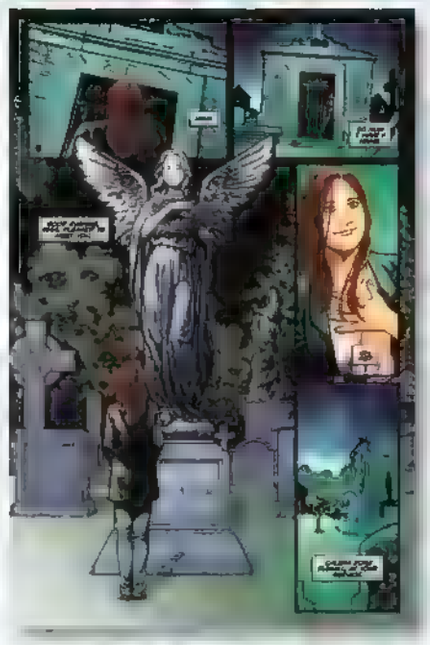
CG: "We're going to be continuing. There's going to be a change dramatically but the tone will remain the same. There's been some concern that we're going to make it a larger story, with more cosmic evil, but that element has always been there in the background anyway and it's in the novel. So we're going to learn more about that but the stories will remain grounded in the same kind of dark issues that we've already been dealing with."

CH: Your *Sons Of Anarchy* miniseries is now on the home strait. Has that been a different experience compared to your other comic work?

CG: "As a licensed property, it's very difficult because the creative windows are so narrow. When I did *Buffy*, they treated the books as if they were a parallel universe continuity so it didn't matter where they fell. Whereas [showrunner] Kurt Sutter and his staff are expecting us to be in continuity so the comic book takes place at a specific time during season five. It literally has to fit right there. So it's been a tough nut to crack, getting the voices and the tone right. It's been a long process with the people in the writers' room, who are doing the approvals, because they keep saying, 'What about this or that?' and we'd say, 'It's in the next issue.' The six issues are really just one episode and yet we have to keep hitting certain notes every issue to remind the reader every month of certain things." [CH]

***Cemetery Girl* is out now through Jo Fletcher Books.**

KID, THIS AIN'T WORTH JAIL TIME. I GOT NOTHING.
WATCH AND WALLET, OLD MAN, AND CELL PHONE IF YOU GOT ONE. OR I'LL PUT YOU IN ONE OF THESE GRAVES.



Above: Young Calexa is trying low in the cemetery, but she can't hide from the dead

Black is the new red

Nathan Edmondson

As the Black Widow steals the spotlight in a new series, Nathan Edmondson talks about her murky past and why sometimes even the Avengers need the softly, softly approach

By David West

Photo by Ed Peterson

BORN AUGUSTA, GEORGIA
HIGH OLYMPUS
NOW BLACK WIDOW
MORE www.nathan-e.com

Natalia "Natasha" Romanova first sashayed into the Marvel Universe in the pages of *Tales Of Suspense* #52 in 1964. In her debut, Natasha took the form of a glamorous Soviet spy, codenamed Black Widow, who was sent to the United States by her KGB masters to seduce Tony Stark and gain access to his industrial secrets.

After teaming up with Hawkeye (then a villain himself) and the Crimson Dynamo during several run-ins with Iron Man, Natasha turned against her Soviet overlords, abandoned Mother Russia and joined the stars and stripes team. She became an Avenger, went on to lead the short-lived superteam The Champions, and in the process became one of Marvel's most enduring superheroines.

As she approaches her 50th anniversary, the catsuit-clad secret agent has never enjoyed a higher profile both in comics and in the movies, where Scarlett Johansson brought her to life in *Iron Man 2* and the box office record-breaking smash *The Avengers*. Now she takes centre stage in her new solo series by artist Phil Noto and writer Nathan Edmondson, who checks in to reveal his plans for the deadly Widow.

Comic Heroes: When a character has as much history (and as complicated a history) as Natasha, is that baggage weighing her down or does it give you a lot to work with?

Nathan Edmondson: "What's great about Natasha is her past is, on the one hand, known to everyone but on the other fairly murky and not well defined. That's our advantage as storytellers, we now know her intimately and we will slowly introduce her to those who don't, and tantalise those who do with very new slices of her past and present."

CH: How much have the *Iron Man* and *The Avengers* movies driven a resurgence of interest in Natasha?

NE: "So far, a significant amount and I think Black Widow's fame will take another giant leap this year between the comic and the *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* film, in which she will play a major role. Joss Whedon has also discussed how she will be a main player in next year's *The Avengers 2* so her star, I believe, is going to keep rising for quite some time."

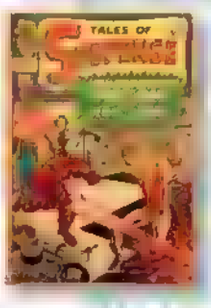
© Images © Marvel

CH: What tone are you going for with the series? Spy thriller? Superhero adventure? Grim and gritty?

NE: "I think Phil and I have struck a very fun balance. Our approach to *Black Widow* has all the bombast of a badass superhero comic with the tooth and nail of Natasha's villainous past and ruthless methods and capabilities. She's uncompromising, and sometimes the pages are too. And ultimately it is a spy thriller; Natasha is the espionage arm of the Avengers and she is a mercenary spy-assassin herself. She is the quiet and precise approach to the world's big bad problems, even if 'quiet' involves some big explosions. She's thoughtful and she doesn't move without the right information, which she often gathers herself; thus she is a spy first and foremost."

CH: Natasha is tough but she's not superpowered. Speaking creatively, is that a plus or a drawback?

NE: "Personally it is a major plus to be working on this book where we challenge a 'regular' person with incredible odds. I enjoy taking a real world character and seeing how high I can make them jump. We're constantly pushing



Natasha's limits and testing her against various villains and sticky situations. In the Marvel Universe, Natasha's humanness is in fact, a plus. There are situations where Captain America, Iron Man or Thor can't break their way through and crush an enemy, when more finesse and spy work is required. There are countries that SHIELD can't infiltrate, but she, a one-woman army, can. Mostly, though, our Black Widow series focuses on Natasha when she isn't standing with any team or agency. We will witness her home life, her solo missions, her ongoing and laborious journey of atonement."

CH: Have you had to do much research into Russia and the history of the Soviet Union?

NE: "I certainly came to this book with a working knowledge, especially Cold War period history. In addition to being a fairly well-read student of history, my previous spy work filled my shelves with books on the area and I'll explore more as necessary. There are some nods to Russian legends and the KGB, and perhaps a villain or two born in the glory of St Petersburg or the rubble of Leningrad."

CH: Can you give us any hints about who and what Natasha is up against in the opening plot line?

NE: "Warlords, vicious criminals, deadly assassins, one pissed off religious nut and a paranoid supervillain."

CH: What about a Rogue's Gallery?

NE: "We will pull this curtain back slowly, in some subtle and some overt ways. Ultimately, this is Natasha's book but her journey will inevitably lead her across the paths of others."

CH: Any love interests on the horizon? Or old flames?

NE: "On the horizon, yes. We don't jump into any soap operas right away. Natasha's a busy girl, love isn't a priority with deadly ninja assassins at her throat. We want to make it clear that part of her atonement for her past is a present loneliness – very much like a single parent may put dating on the backburner, she has a higher priority that drives her. Loneliness can creep up though and we all, once in a while, need someone to hold on to. Who Natasha lets in close in those colder moments is a very difficult question. Who can she trust, really?"

Above: Thanks to recent box office smashes, Black Widow's star has never been higher – 50 years after she first made an appearance opposite Iron Man in *Tales Of Suspense*

CH: In her earliest appearances, Natasha was a femme fatale. Over the years, she has grown to become stronger, more dynamic and to lead other heroes into battle. How do you want to see her character grow going forward?

NE: "I see her drawing from the strengths of both while ultimately climbing toward a superheroic status where she fundamentally changes the state of global warfare; this though, will come only through monumentally difficult struggles and a long, lonely, dedicated journey." CH

***Black Widow*'s new run starts this month.**

From legal robes to caped crusaders

Charles Soule

The new *She-Hulk* writer is very specific about why he's particularly suited to the role. And no, it's not because he's green skinned...

By Stephen Jewell

© Photo by Seth Kushner

BORN MILWAUKEE
HIGH 27
NOW SHE-HULK
MORE www.charlessoule.com

As a practising lawyer himself, Charles Soule is a natural choice to relaunch the monthly adventures of Marvel's emerald skinned legal eagle. A graduate of Columbia Law School, the Milwaukee-born author first burst onto the comics scene with hit Image series *27*, which offered a sinister explanation as to why so many famous rock musicians have met tragic ends at that ominous age.

From Marvel jailbirds *Thunderbolts* to *Swamp Thing*, *Red Lanterns* and *Superman/Wonder Woman* over at DC, he is adding so many strings to his bow that he surely has to give up the day job sometime soon.

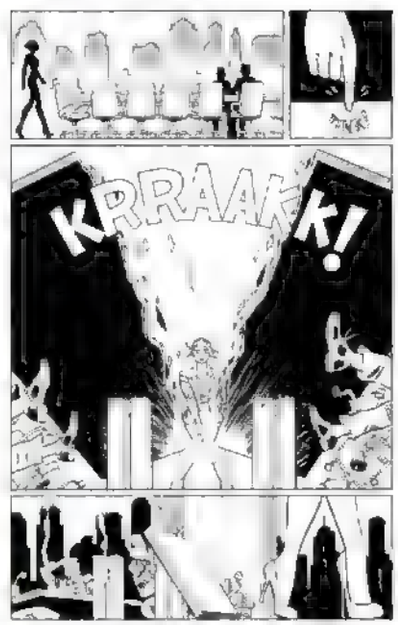
Now the New York-based scribe is teaming up with *Hawkeye* artist Javier Pulido to take on Bruce Banner's larger-than-life cousin, Jennifer Walters. Promising to echo the sardonic tone that was such a strong feature of John Byrne's classic '80s *Sensational She-Hulk* along with Dan Slott's equally rewarding, more recent spell, Soule is relishing how Shulkie is one of the few heroes who absolutely revels in her superheroic status. "If I haven't overused it, the word to best describe what to expect is fun," he tells *Comic Heroes*, promising to serve up the same kind of character-driven stories as Matt Fraction and Mark Waid are currently doing on cult favourites *Hawkeye* and *Daredevil*. And if what Soule serves up is half as good as those high quality titles, we can't wait!

Comic Heroes: Are you incorporating any of your personal experiences in the law profession into *She-Hulk*?

Charles Soule: "One-hundred per cent I am! The fact that Jen Walters is an attorney was a big factor in my taking on the book. I like the idea of applying certain situations from my own professional life to the stories – although, of course, they'll be seen through the Marvel Universe lens.

"I think it's safe to say that the legal stuff will be a huge part of my *She-Hulk* title. In some ways, it's a legal procedural comic, like a *Law & Order* series in comic form. However, it's really a focused, interesting look at a really cool character – her job is just one part of it. And there's lots of punching, too – promise."

"It's like *Law & Order* in comic form. With lots of punching!"



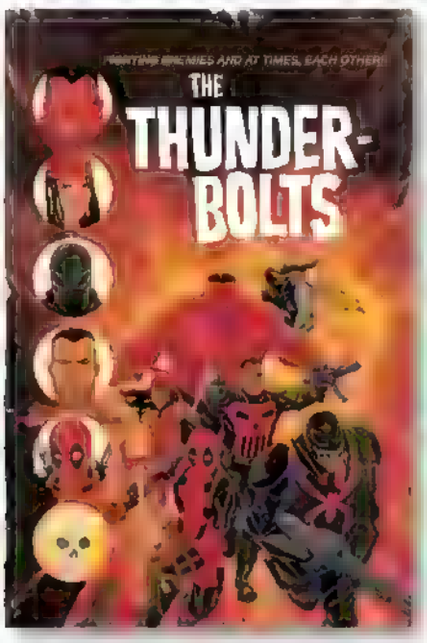
All images © Marvel

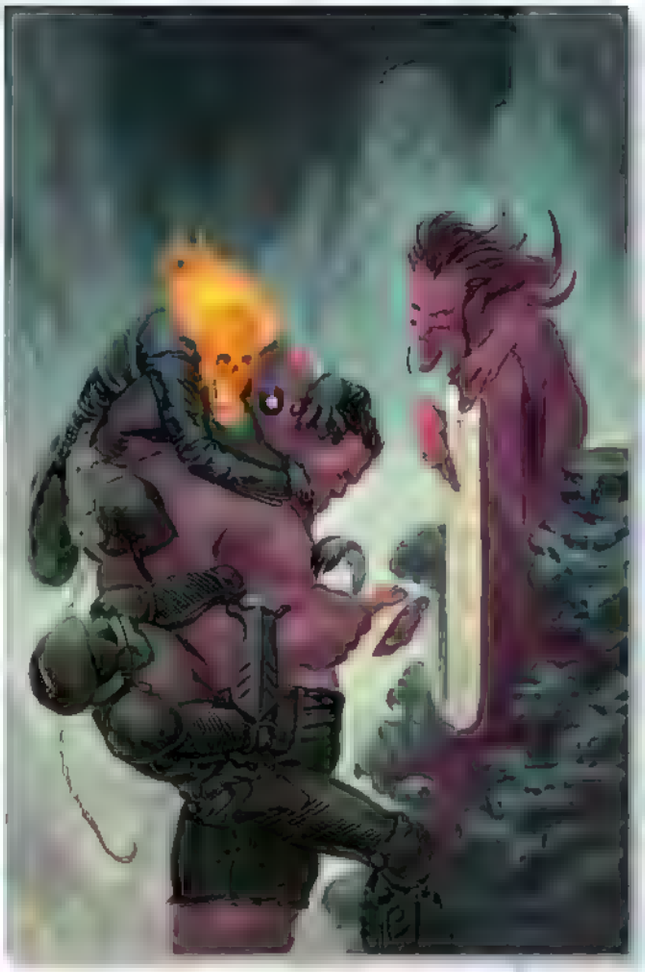
CH: What are your first memories of She-Hulk?

CS: "My first real encounter with Jen Walters in a solo title was probably Dan Slott's run, but since then I've gone back and read a bunch of her earlier appearances, including the great, fourth-wall-breaking work from John Byrne. *She-Hulk* has always been a unique title, and that's part of what makes her fun to write."

CH: So will Jen be smashing through the creative barrier and interacting with the readers like she famously did when John Byrne was on the book?

CS: "The fourth wall stuff was so unique to Byrne's take – as was the screwball tone of Slott's run – that I would be doing myself a disservice by trying to emulate it. That said, both of those runs were very self-aware with respect to the Marvel Universe as a whole, taking its concepts to their logical conclusions, such as while Peter Parker's webbing dissolves eventually, for a time after a big fight it's probably hanging all over New York City... It's silly things like that – and no, that one's not going in the book! But I will be continuing that sort of thing, just because I think it's cool."





Generally, though, the take will be my take, because isn't that the whole point?"

CH: Shulkie has previously been overshadowed by Bruce and there's now so many other Hulks around, including Red Hulk and Red She-Hulk, so will Jen be even more crowded out?

CS: "The uniqueness of any character is up to the team creating that character, in my opinion. But the lack of angst in Jen's attitude about her situation makes her really refreshing, and based on the response I've gotten from She-Hulk fans since the book was announced, people seem very much ready for her to come back in her own solo title. There might be other Hulks running around, but there's only one She-Hulk!"

CH: Are you enjoying your creative partnership with Javier Pulido?

CS: "He's amazing. We're already developing a sort of mixed Marvel-style approach where I just let him do his thing as far as page designs and layouts in a number of areas. As far as I'm concerned, Javier's going to have better ideas about that stuff than I ever will, so I'm not going to get in the way. I'll tell you this – regardless of how the book reads, it's going to look spectacular."

CH: After taking it over last year, you're relaunching *Thunderbolts* next month with Ghost Rider joining series regulars Punisher, Elektra and Deadpool. Do you thrive on the dysfunctional dynamic that there is between a band of misfits?

Above: Ghost Rider makes his debut alongside the bunch of misfits that are the Thunderbolts
Top left: She-Hulk proves she's got brains *and* brawn.

CS: "That whole 'team of antiheroes' thing is a big part of it. In addition to the guys you listed, we've also got Red Hulk, Venom and fan favourite – or possibly just Charles Soule favourite, but I think he'll get there – Red Leader. The Thunderbolts are not predictable, and don't fit into the standard mode of hero vs villain. In many stories, there is no traditional villain, or the 'Bolts fit that role themselves. Plus, they all sort of hate each other, and bicker all the time, which makes for some really cool writing opportunities."

CS: You're one of the few writers currently working for both Marvel and DC; how do they differ?

CS: "The Marvel and DC universes have slightly different feels, but that's partly just how I approach it. What both sides of the Big Two fence have are fabulous characters and story opportunities, and I feel very fortunate that I get to play in both sandboxes." **CH!**

***Thunderbolts* and *She-Hulk* both relaunch in February.**

Returning to his roots

Yanick Paquette

He's teaming up once again with Grant Morrison, but on a Wonder Woman project that he regards as a flip side to his work on *Swamp Thing*

By Joel Meadows

BORN CANADA
HIGH SWAMP THING
NOW WONDER WOMAN
MORE yanickpaquette.deviantart.com/

Artist Yanick Paquette is a Canadian creator who has worked for DC and Marvel during a career that started in the mid '90s. He has collaborated with everyone from Grant Morrison to Roy Thomas, Kurt Busiek to Peter Hogan. He kicked off DC's New 52 iteration of its horror icon *Swamp Thing* in 2011 and his distinctive style is still very much in demand. *Comic Heroes* caught up with him to find out all about his latest project, what collaborating with Grant Morrison offers him as an artist, and the appeal of working on a wide variety of material.

Comic Heroes: So what are you working on at the moment?
Yanick Paquette: "At the moment, I'm doing something called *The Trial Of Diana Prince*. It's a massive monster of a book and you can tell I'm dwarfed by the task. It's 120 pages of thinking about society and the behaviour of Wonder Woman."

CH: It was originally envisioned as an *Earth One* book, so is it a revamp of the character, as we saw with the Superman and the Batman books?
YP: "I like to think of it more as a reinvention. We had to think 'How can we modernise her?'"

CH: So how have you approached it?
YP: "Grant Morrison is doing a lot of the thinking, so for me, it's more about the visuals. I've been thinking about this book for a long time, way before *Swamp Thing* – and even way before *Batman Inc* – because it was what I initially came to DC to do. So I spent a couple of years thinking about the visuals. I wanted the stuff to be as scientific as possible. It's almost like a counterpoint to *Swamp Thing* – my *Swamp Thing* work and my *Wonder Woman* work might work as a diptych. I discovered that a lot of the graphic decisions I'd take on *Diana Prince* have almost been in response to my work on *Swamp Thing*."

> **"Grant always gives me something that I want to draw"**

CH: So it's almost like a celebration to say that she's a very positive character...?
YP: "We live in a world now – and I'm just talking about the graphic aspect – where grit is cool. I went with my kids to see *Man Of Steel* because I couldn't have them see *Batman*."

CH: How old are your children?
YP: "They're seven and ten, so I thought *Batman*'s just too dark so at least let's go and see *Superman*. But they couldn't bear it – I thought it was weak too, because of course gritty works, but it was weak to take that easy route. I was looking to see if they could do something cool and positive with the character on the screen but they didn't even try. So we left. With Wonder Woman, I want to show her as positive and yet successful."

CH: So will your Wonder Woman be influenced by that HG Peters look?
YP: "I don't care for the costume that much. I did make some modifications but at the end of the day they're just costumes. We wanted Wonder Woman to have a number of different costumes so she could dress up. There was the official costume from which I tried to remove all the American design features. It made no sense that Wonder Woman had all

this American stuff on her costume when she's come from such a rich culture – the Greek culture."

CH: So did you tap into the Greek culture when you were thinking about her look?
YP: "Yeah, I did in a way. It's not Xena and the Greek culture that is usually associated with Wonder Woman, it's Ancient Greece but it would make no sense that the girls would flee Greece and for 2,000 years, they would have dressed the same way as the Greeks did. So what we've been trying to do is project where they would eventually end up in terms of culture and science."

CH: It's a big book. Have you enjoyed doing a big standalone project – you're a guy who's used to doing a lot of 20 to 22-page issues?
YP: "I hate the monthly book cycle. From the start, it was clear that the monthly book wasn't for me. For a long time now, I haven't been doing monthlies. *Batman Inc* was four issues with as much lead time as possible. With *Swamp Thing*, I had to say yes because it was a labour of love."

CH: How far are you into the project?
YP: "Not that far. It will be out the middle of next year."

CH: Your *Swamp Thing* feels like a nod to Berni Wrightson. Would you say that's a fair comment?
YP: "My first graphic love was Berni Wrightson. I grew up with Berni and *Swamp Thing*. Then I saw the power and the potential for comics through Alan Moore's own run on the book. *Swamp Thing* was there at a very important moment in my career. Eventually when I got offered the book, it felt like I was coming home to my roots. That's not to say that people in the modern era can't do *Swamp Thing* but the few people who do manage it, they're all classical artists, the same style as me. So I guess as I started on it, I felt part of a legacy, like joining a little club. It's an homage but also a continuation."

CH: Do you approach each project differently?
YP: "Yes, I try to make them all unique. I try to think what's the best style for each. On *Swamp Thing*, it was experimental and on *Diana Prince*, I'll make some of it experimental because that was very well received on *Swamp Thing*."

Above: Paquette has worked for DC on *Swamp Thing* and *Batman Inc* but his upcoming Wonder Woman epic promises to be his biggest project yet

CH: Grant used to do character sketches in the old days. Does he still do that?
YP: "No, I just get a regular script."

CH: How much have you talked to Grant?
YP: "Not much. If I have a question, I'll pass it through Kristian, his wife, which is the human side of this entire thing."

CH: Grant has got such a huge reputation. Was that part of the project's appeal?
YP: "I've worked with Grant many times. The thing is that he's always going to give me something that I want to draw. I don't really care for comics, or superheroes, usually, so at least Grant will give me something which is unexpected and new. His writing is always stimulating and intelligent." CH

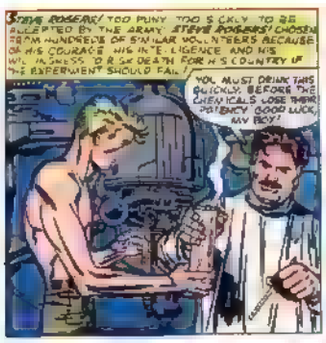
***The Trial Of Diana Prince* is due out some time this summer. Probably.**

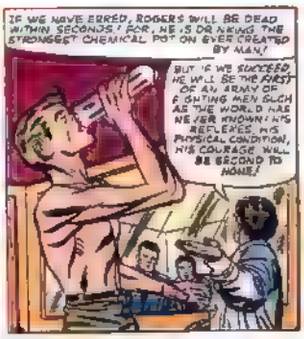
* Originally titled Wonder Woman: Earth One, the book was renamed back in August

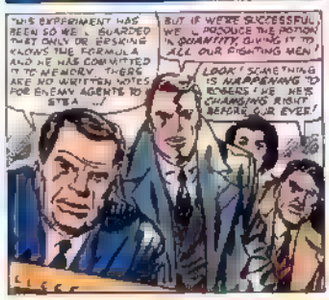
LIVING LEGEND

The life and times of Captain America

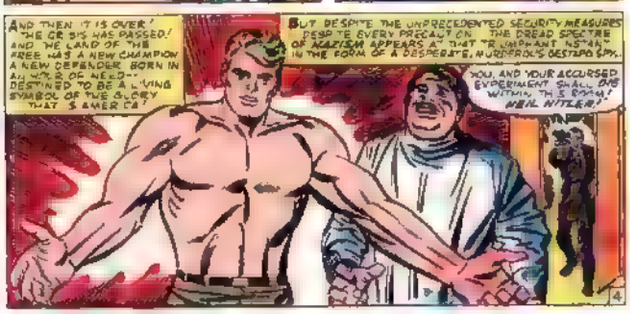
He's got no powers: sort of. He's the living embodiment of the most powerful nation on Earth: kind of. He's Marvel's Sentinel of Liberty, a World War II warrior let loose on modern America, and not always sure he likes what he finds... **By Matt Bielby**


STEVE ROGERS! TOO PUNY... TOO SICKLY... TO BE ACCEPTED BY THE ARMY... STEVE ROGERS! CHOSEN FROM HUNDREDS OF SIMILAR VOLUNTEERS BECAUSE OF HIS COURAGE... HIS INTELLIGENCE AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO RISK DEATH FOR HIS COUNTRY IF THE EXPERIMENT SHOULD FAIL!
YOU MUST DRINK THIS QUICKLY, BEFORE THE CHEMICALS LOSE THEIR POTENCY! GOOD LUCK, MY BOY!


IF WE HAVE ERRED, ROGERS WILL BE DEAD WITHIN SECONDS! FOR, HE IS DRINKING THE STRONGEST CHEMICAL POTION EVER CREATED BY MAN!
BUT IF WE SUCCEED, HE WILL BE THE FIRST OF AN ARMY OF FIGHTING MEN SUCH AS THE WORLD HAS NEVER KNOWN! HIS REFLEXES, HIS PHYSICAL CONDITION, HIS COURAGE WILL BE SECOND TO NONE!


THIS EXPERIMENT HAS BEEN SO WELL GUARDED THAT ONLY DR. REINSTEIN KNOWS THE FORMULA... AND HE HAS COMMITTED IT TO MEMORY. THERE ARE NO WRITTEN NOTES FOR ENEMY AGENTS TO STEAL...!
BUT IF WE'RE SUCCESSFUL, WE'LL PRODUCE THE POTION IN QUANTITY, GIVING IT TO ALL OUR FIGHTING MEN!
LOOK! SOMETHING IS HAPPENING TO ROGERS! HE'S CHANGING RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES!

EVERYTHING IS SPINNING AROUND--! BLACKING OUT... MUST HANG ON... HANG ON...!
IT'S WORKING! DON'T GIVE UP, SON! HOLD ON! THIS IS THE MOMENT OF CRISIS! YOU MUST SURVIVE!


AND THEN IT IS OVER! THE CRISIS HAS PASSED! AND THE LAND OF THE FREE HAS A NEW CHAMPION, A NEW DEFENDER, BORN IN AN HOUR OF NEED--DESTINED TO BE A LIVING SYMBOL OF THE GLORY THAT IS AMERICA!
BUT DESPITE THE UNPRECEDENTED SECURITY MEASURES, DESPITE EVERY PRECAUTION... THE DREAD SPECTRE OF NAZISM APPEARS AT THAT TRIUMPHANT MOMENT IN THE FORM OF A DESPERATE, MURDEROUS DESTRO SPY...
YOU, AND YOUR ACCURSED EXPERIMENT SHALL DIE WITHIN THE SOUND OF HEIL HITLER!

THE MARVEL AGE of COMICS REACHES A NEW PEAK OF GLORY, with
"CAPTAIN AMERICA"
THE MOST ENTHUSIASTICALLY REQUESTED CHARACTER REVIVAL OF ALL TIME!
THE FIRST OF A GREAT NEW SERIES!
BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE TWO BEST QUALIFIED MEN IN ALL OF COMICDOM
STAN LEE, Author
JACK KIRBY, Illustrator
INKED BY CHIC STONE
LETTERED BY S. ROSEN

Most superheroes are potent wish-fulfillment fantasies, but few more on-the-nose than Captain America. Here's this weedy "milksop" – "too puny, too sickly to be accepted by the Army" – rescued from the shame of being refused entry into the forces prior to Pearl Harbor. But he's brave and, for some reason, determined to risk his life – and if it can't be on the battlefield, . . well, what about offering yourself up as test subject for a ludicrously rushed, poorly documented Government experiment? Sure, says plucky Steve Rogers. I'm your man.

The plan was to create a legion of super-soldiers through vitamin injections and whatnot, but things immediately go wrong. Add "poorly policed" to the list of Project Rebirth's shortcomings, for a Nazi assassin has been at the heart of the experiment all along, and now chooses to shoot dead the Super-Soldier serum's creator, Dr Josef Reinstein. The newly huge and muscular Rogers smashes the killer's head in, but the damage has been done. The dream of regiments of perfect American soldiers dies with Reinstein, but one superman lives on. Soon he'll be kitted up in a gaudy, flag-based uniform, and sent to war.

It's a fairly silly origin, but powerful, and though the details have been messed with over the years, the basic sequence of events remains a key building block of the Marvel Universe. Today we're told Rogers is not of vaguely English descent, as his name might suggest, but actually poor Lower East Side Irish. All along, Dr Reinstein had been an alias for Abraham Erskine, although the good doctor remains a German defector. Assorted retellings show very different scientific procedures, few of them likely. Whatever, the effects are immediate – it's hard to argue with Reinstein, Erskine's claim that this is "the strongest chemical potion ever created by man".

1941-1954: CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS

The core appeal of Captain America was obvious. To kids, he was something you too could become, no matter your physical inadequacy, if only a friendly scientist would welcome you into his lab. To soldiers, he was a dream. Steve Rogers hides out as a lowly Private (initially in a Virginia army camp), constantly messing up and chucked on spud-bashing duties – but even his exasperated commanding officers salute when danger comes calling and Rogers slips away, to reappear as Captain America. While superhero groundbreakers Superman and Batman were still fighting gangsters and aliens, the brasher Timely characters – Sub-Mariner, Human Torch and co – had been queuing up to put their fists through the faces of real-life Nazi villains for some time, and now the early 1941 creation of Captain America upped the ante. More than any other superhero, he'd demonstrate a single-minded dedication to the art of war.

Though strong, fast and supremely capable, Cap was never bullet-proof like Superman, so he carried a stars-and-stripes shield – and wore a costume in which chain-mail appeared to be a crucial »

Above left: The original drawings became somewhat hard to drink at one point.
Above: The plucky patriot leaps into action in Tales Of Suspense #59, his first solo appearance in the Silver Age.

All images © Marvel

More than any other superhero, he'd demonstrate a single-minded dedication to the art of war

WHEREVER YOU'RE HIDDEN, SKULL--I'LL FIND YOU!
I KNOW YOU CAPTURED SHARON IN ORDER TO BRING ME TO YOU.
I KNOW YOU'VE GOT EVERY MAN, EVERY WEAPON SET TO DESTROY ME ON SIGHT--
BUT I ALSO KNOW THAT NOTHING ON EARTH CAN KEEP ME FROM YOU--
NOTHING ON EARTH WILL SAVE YOU--IF ONE HAIR OF MAT GIR'S HEAD HAS BEEN HARMED!

CAP REELS AS IF HE'D BEEN STRUCK A SHARP BLOW! THE OCCUPANTS OF THE ROOM DETECT HIS PRESENCE AND WHIRL ABOUT TO FACE HIM-- A VIOLENT PAST HAS SUDDENLY BECOME THE HAUNTING PRESENT! MEMORY SCARS ARE NOW FRESH WOUNDS!
TEUFEL!! IT'S HIM, HE'S RETURNED!
"CAPTAIN AMERICA" WHO ELSE WOULD COME TO MOCK ME 'N HEIN OHMY RETREAT
YOU GOT IN--BUT YOU WON'T GET OUT!
CAP! I-I TOLD THEM NOTHING, NOTHING--!
HAHAHAHA! DOESN'T MATTER NOW! WE'VE GOT OUR ANSWERS, LITTLE PIG!

component from the off. To artist and co-creator Jack Kirby, once himself a Lower East Side street-brawler, Cap offered a chance to show the most balletic, lengthy fight scenes he could imagine. "You could throw 10 guys up against Captain America, and he'd find a way to beat them all," he once said. "I enjoyed drawing that kind of scene because I was forced to figure out how he would do such a thing, and then draw it in an interesting fashion."

Captain America was never the most original of ideas – the fact that he was largely inspired by MLJ/Archie Comics hero the Shield, who'd appeared the previous year, was no secret – but Cap was the immediate success that MLJ's "G-Man extraordinary" could only dream of, and it wasn't hard to see why. Cap had the more evocative costume, the pro-active Nazi-bashing, and Kirby's unique talents.

Cap had largely been created by Joe Simon – then working as editor and art director at Martin Goodman's Timely Comics[1] – but it was Kirby, his sometime partner and speed merchant artist, who grabbed the first drawing assignment. Goodman had become worried that Hitler might be killed before their new hero's first issue hit the newsstands, so the plan became to get their licks in early just in case. Hence, the iconic first cover showing an audacious Cap punching out the Fuhrer himself. Beyond this bold move – actual Nazis – the first issue's basic story was very much in the style of the Shield's origin, and the casual observer could be forgiven for seeing just another patriotic Fifth Column basher here. But they'd be wrong, and one word sums up why: Kirby.

Since the beginning of comics as we know them, this short, self-taught New Yorker of Austrian Jewish extraction had been one of the industry's most independent spirits, and its most hard-working action artist. Kirby captured a sort of superhuman "bigness" other artists could only dream of, and his heroic musculature and dynamic figure-work became an industry gold standard. His dynamic Cap stories seemed to leap off the page, and even those who hated they way he drew found themselves trying to copy it. In time he'd change the way everyone presented fight scenes and, in this, Captain America makes his claim to be almost as important a building block of the superhero genre as Superman.

Still, that Cap was quite the immediate hit that it was – selling a million copies, almost *Superman* numbers – shocked everybody, and soon Simon and Goodman were brainstorming further patriotic heroes, while Cap himself got bolder with every tale, the second issue even taking his fight into the Black Forest itself.[2]

Though Joe and Jack would soon leave Timely, *Captain America* would remain the company's best-selling title through the war. The pair would create further war based hit strips for DC before conscription separated them, and though Cap's initial

Above: A small thing like an ocean doesn't get in the way of Cap's pursuit of Red Skull.
Above right & below: *Captain America's Bicentennial Battles* 1976. Cap's never happier than when he's battling Nazis with Bucky by his side.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

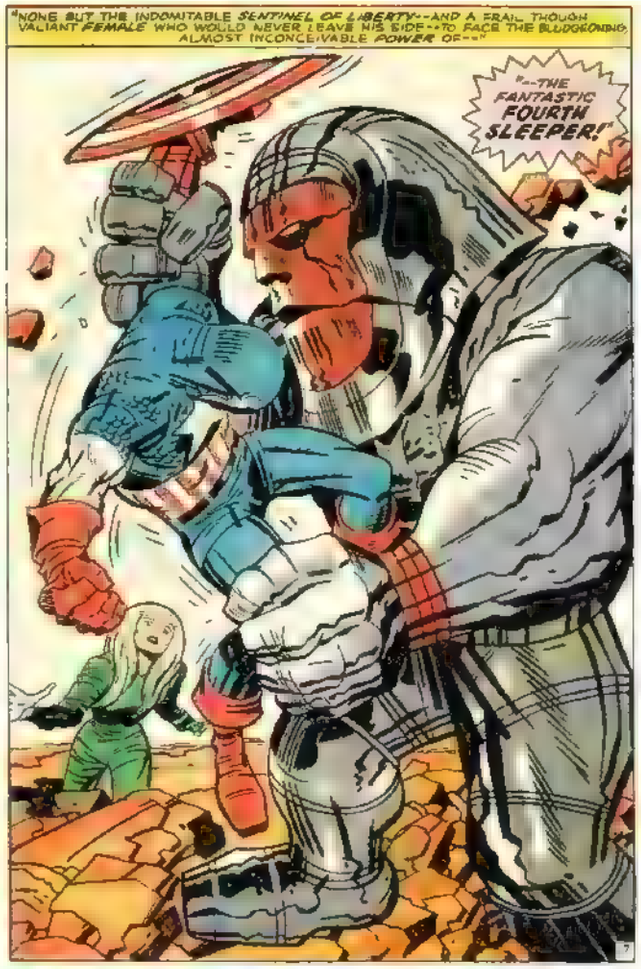
A flag-waving hero timeline; only the major American-themed heroes are allowed, or we'd be here all day...

1940 The Shield
MLJ/Archie Comics
Strong, fast, tough patriotic hero, powered by chemicals and x-rays; works for the FBI, has a boy companion called Dusty, and a costume built around a huge shield-shaped chest logo.

1940 Uncle Sam
Quality Comics/DC
This Will Eisner creation was initially portrayed as the ghost of a dead soldier from the Revolution, fighting alongside his sidekick Buddy; DC acquired him in the '50s and his origin has changed many times.

[2] It was when writing an early, rather rubbish *Captain America*

KRAK!
I-IT'S GOT ME! I-I CAN'T GET LOOSE! I CAN'T PULL AWAY!
HELP ME! I--IT'S CRUSHING MY ARMS!
UGH-H--!
COME BACK ADOLF! I'M GOING TO MAKE SOME CHANGES HERE!
NO! NO! YOU CANNOT TOUCH OUR SACRED FUEHRER!
I'LL START WITH CHANGING SOME MAPS-- YOURS!!!
KRONTCH!


"NONE BUT THE INDOMITABLE SENTINEL OF LIBERTY--AND A FRAIL THOUGH VALIANT FEMALE WHO WOULD NEVER LEAVE HIS SIDE--TO FACE THE BLUDGEONING ALMOST INCONCEIVABLE POWER OF--"
"--THE FANTASTIC FOURTH SLEEPER!"

Above: The Nazi-designed Fourth Sleeper in *Captain America* #112 (1969). Kirby's Cap here seems less of a caricature than he would later become.
Above left: A classic Kirby double-page spread from *Captain America* #211 (July 1977).

glory years would fade with war's end, his stories spluttered on, notably with an early 50s revival as a Commie-fighter. But then Cap was gone again, the old wartime magic never recaptured, and it would be a very different version of the character who'd eventually re-emerge, again with Kirby at the helm. Soon this Greatest Generation hero would be vying with the likes of Spider-Man and the Hulk as Marvel's most recognisable character.

1964-1972: RED, WHITE AND THE BLUES

In the modern Marvel Universe's earliest years, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were grabbing ideas from everywhere, and immediately brought two of Marvel's Golden Age stars back in the pages of their earliest '60s superhero comic, *Fantastic Four*. First came the Human Torch rethought as a hot-headed but essentially benign teenager, then Prince Namor, the Sub Mariner, now cast as a romantic, conflicted villain. A revival for Cap – third of that WW2 triumvirate – was surely inevitable, and Lee found a smart way to cast this square-jawed boy scout as an alienated hero too, playing up the "man out of time" aspects when the initial incarnation of the Avengers found him frozen in a giant ice cube, preserved by the Arctic cold.

Still first into any fight and a devil with that shield, this Cap was a lost soul, born into a strange "science fiction" world and forever grieving his lost buddy, Bucky Barnes, Cap's 1940s sidekick who, he soon learns, had died in the heroic act that had sent Cap himself adrift all these years.

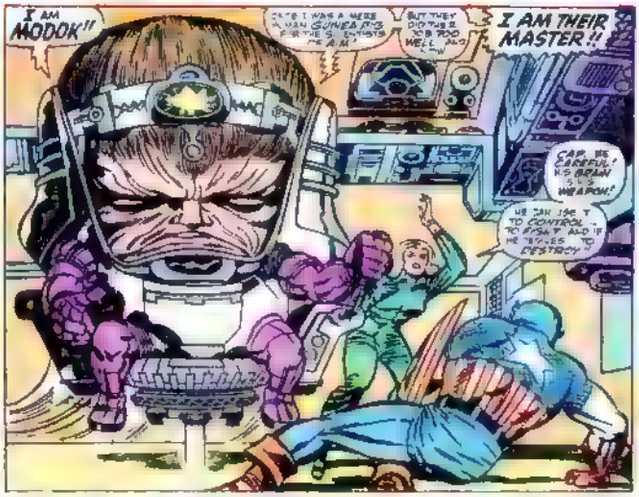
"I don't belong in this age – this year – no place for me," he moans, but soon finds new meaning when he joins fresh new superhero team the Avengers, and particularly when the war-weary veteran is forced to take beginners under his wing – first the Hulk's old sidekick, Rick Jones, who becomes a Bucky surrogate in *Avengers* #4, and then an entire team of newbies when the original Avengers, en masse, decide to take extended sabbaticals. »

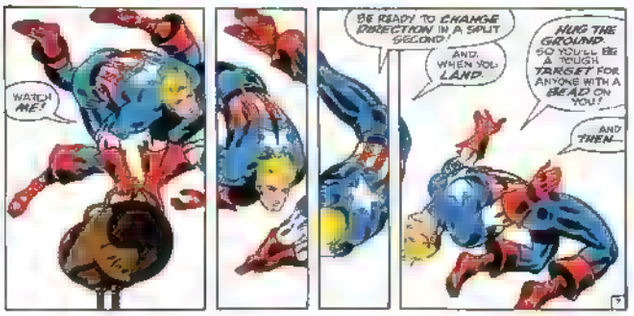
> **"Cap sold a million copies – almost *Superman* numbers"**

1941 Mr America
National Comics/DC
A 1938-introduced PI/adventurer called Tex Thompson got patriotic by 1941, known first as Mr America (whistled *Yankee Doodle* and had a sidekick called Fatman) and then Americommando, a more serious super-spy type.

1941 Minute-Man
Fawcett Comics/DC
"One-man army" named for the American revolutionaries; really an Army private dressed in the flag (horizontally striped shirt, stars on the sleeves) and undertaking secret missions behind enemy lines.

1941 Captain America
Timely Comics/Marvel
Inspired by the Shield, and originally to have been called "Super American"; changed from carrying a shield-shaped shield to the familiar round one when MLJ complained that Cap looked too much like their guy.




WATCH ME!
BE READY TO CHANGE DIRECTION IN A SPLIT SECOND!
AND, WHEN YOU LAND!
HUG THE GROUND SO YOU'LL BE A TOUGH TARGET FOR ANYONE WITH A BEAD ON YOU!
AND THEN...

Top: Recurring foe MODOK.
Above: Crisp, mighty-page art on from Sterankoon *Captain America* #1.

By early '65 a solo Captain America was playing second fiddle to Iron Man in the pages of *Tales Of Suspense* as well, and the hero's revival was well under way Cap allowed a reinvigorated Jack Kirby to present the sort of fights that didn't suit Hulk, the FF or Thor here gymnastic acrobatics and a bizarre mix of martial arts But the new *Cap* strip was a funny thing Yes, it linked Marvel s early years with its exciting present like no other series, but it demonstrated a constant underlying tension between Lee's interests and Kirby's

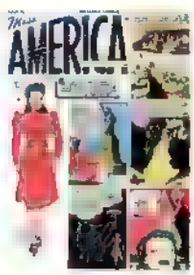
For Jack, *Captain America* was all about the fights, and his very first companionless adventure "the most enthusiastically requested character revival of all time"

boasted the splash page was 10 pages long, of which seven were an extended fight sequence Kirby was really letting go here, and it was thrilling to see, but it left little room for anything else. This revived Cap was like some endless Western bar room brawl pure Kirby, in a way but fans who came for the soap opera interaction to be found in the other Marvel strips must have been disappointed. Some readers started to prefer the version of ol' wing head that had become default lead in the Avengers, but there was magic here too: this was Kirby unleashed, his ever-more pumped-up art and relentless storytelling drive attempting to reinvent comics yet again.

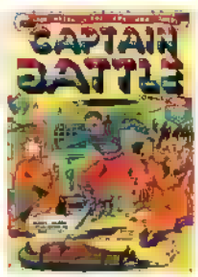
Early solo adventures saw Cap fight a sumo wrestler, a suit of armour, an entire cell block of prisoners, and Nazis, Communists and thugs of every stripe, but soon Kirby was retelling his origin, then sweeping us back in time for almost a year of Cap and Bucky wartime adventures[3]. There was little room for characterisation here, but it lent a sense of history to the new Marvel Universe that undeniably gave it depth and veracity too. Cap and his villains were now interacting with both Nick Fury and SHIELD in the pages of *The Avengers* and elsewhere, and with Sgt Fury and his Howling Commandos in that book and Cap's own WW2 strip and the world Stan and Jack were creating seemed more real than ever

Then, around 1966, things started to change At Marvel, Kirby had shed much of his workload to concentrate on his three favourite strips *Fantastic Four, Thor* and *Captain America* and though Cap's adventures are generally considered the least of these (more grounded, less grand), they still contained their share of the epic. Though the extended brawl was still the feature's stock-in-trade, Kirby began to get as inventive with the plots as he'd always been with the action. Red Skull was back, and soon became one of the most striking Marvel villains, while the Cosmic Cube was introduced[4] and assorted new villains too, including the Sleeper robots, giant German horror-machines heaving with Nazi death imagery Kirby even found time for romance, mystery and (yes) some Lee-pleasing worry about his past too

But outside Marvel there was trouble Joe Simon was bringing a much-threatened



1941 Miss America
Quality Comics/DC
The Statue of Liberty gives reporter Joan Dale element-controlling powers in a dream; on waking, she puts on a patriotic skirt and fights evil. Not to be confused with: Miss America (see page 34).

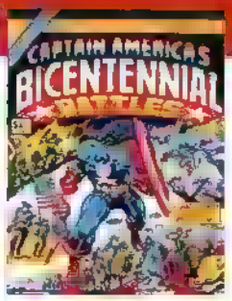


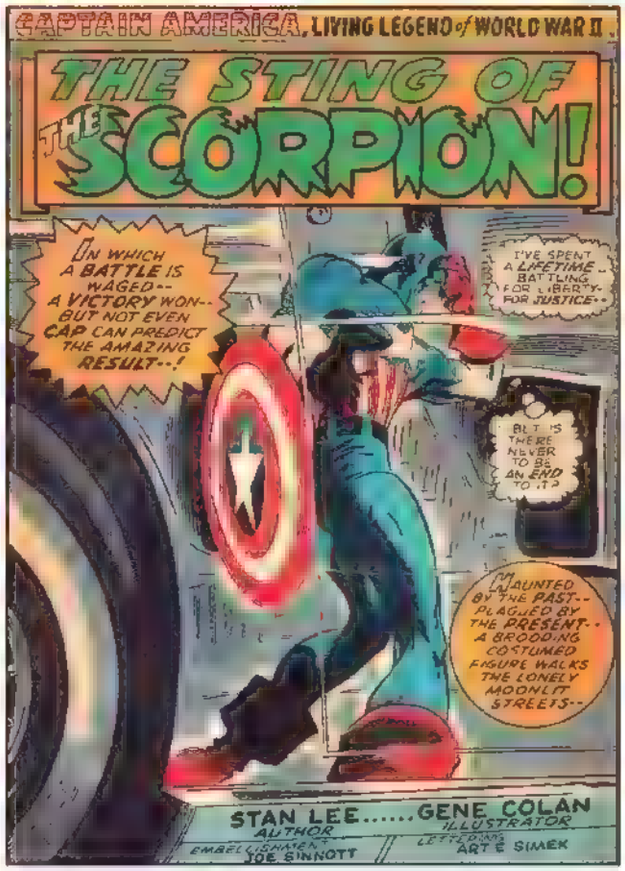
1941 Captain Battle
Lev Gleason Publications
WW1 vet Jonathan Battle wears a jet-pack, and sports both a Nick Fury-style eyepatch and a Cap-style chest star.

1941 The Spirit of 76
Harvey Comics
The Nazi-fighting personification of the Declaration of Independence, clad in a long red coat and domino mask.

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
25¢ 176 AUG
CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON
HOLD, STEVE ROGERS! THOU KNOWEST NOT WHAT THOU DOST!
WRONG THUNDER GOD! I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOING! I'M RENOUNCING MY CAPTAIN AMERICA IDENTITY-- FOREVER!

A John Romita cover from #176, Englehart's Watergate tale.




CAPTAIN AMERICA, LIVING LEGEND of WORLD WAR II
THE STING OF THE SCORPION!
IN WHICH A BATTLE IS WAGED-- A VICTORY WON-- BUT NOT EVEN CAP CAN PREDICT THE AMAZING RESULT--!
I'VE SPENT A LIFETIME BATTLING FOR LIBERTY-- FOR JUSTICE--
BUT IS THERE NEVER TO BE AN END TO IT?
HAUNTED BY THE PAST-- PLAGUED BY THE PRESENT-- A BROODING COSTUMED FIGURE WALKS THE LONELY MOONLIT STREETS--
STAN LEE..... GENE COLAN
AUTHOR ILLUSTRATOR
EMBELLISHMENTS JOE SINNOTT
LETTERING ARTIE SIMEK

court case against the company, pursuing copyright claims on Cap that immediately rammed a wedge between him and his old buddy – and eventually the outcome of this would drive Kirby from Marvel itself. The complicated politics of the '60s were proving an issue too.[5]

With issue #100, *Tales Of Suspense* was renamed *Captain America*, and the stories went full-length, but Kirby left with #107 (November 1968), though we didn't notice immediately – not with the quality of his replacements[6]. Cap survived the 1969-70 cull that took so many Marvel books as the company battened down the hatches and concentrated on the best sellers only, but the fun slowly seeped out of it all the same.

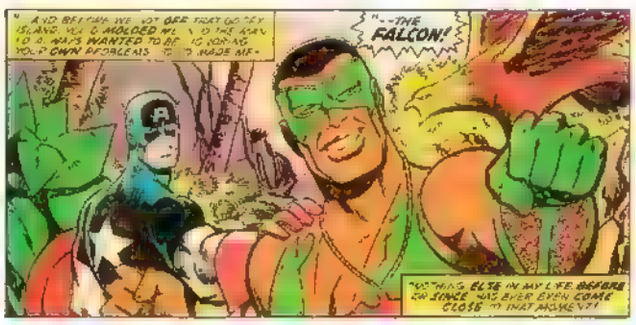
The book would become *Captain America And The Falcon* in 1971 – giving status to an African American co-star who'd been in and out of it for nearly 20 issues – and just about every possible real-world issue would start to be explained away by supervillain influence: the Red Skull would be caught encouraging race riots, MODOK would be behind campus rioting, and black villains – like the sexy Nightshade – would crop up too. Just occasionally, Cap would be shown to work as parody as well as adventure – such as with a fill-in Steve Gerber issue, where the bad guy was a bitter ex-ad man, sick of selling vacuous products to a brain-dead society – but nobody seemed to have quite come to grips with the true potential of the strip. That would soon change.

> **Englehart brought a politically aware sense of realism**

1972-1975: PATRIOT GAMES

By 1972 Sal Buscema had been on *Cap* for ages, it seemed, a clean, competent artist, he forever struggled in his more famous

Above: Brooding over his ot n o n # 22
Below: The Falcon Cap s sidekick for most of the 70s makes his debut



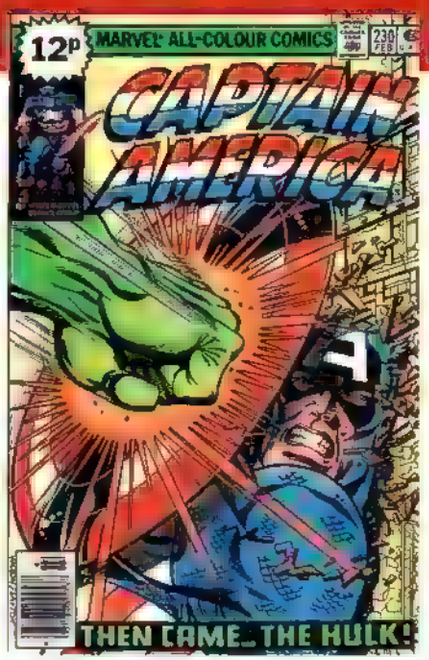
brother's shadow. But then, suddenly, he found himself working on one of Marvel's best selling, most talked-about books for *Captain America* was, unexpectedly going through a major revival at this point, and what was making the strip exciting now was not the art, but the stories. A generation of young writers was bringing radical ambition to the mainstream heroes, and Cap had one of the best of them in Steve Englehart. Around the same time he was reinventing Doctor Strange with artist Frank Brunner, Englehart brought to Cap a new, politically aware sense of realism. This guy, Englehart figured, worked best as a mirror to modern America – the country's past baffled by its present and future, yet fighting for it anyway – and his villains should not necessarily be huge (like »

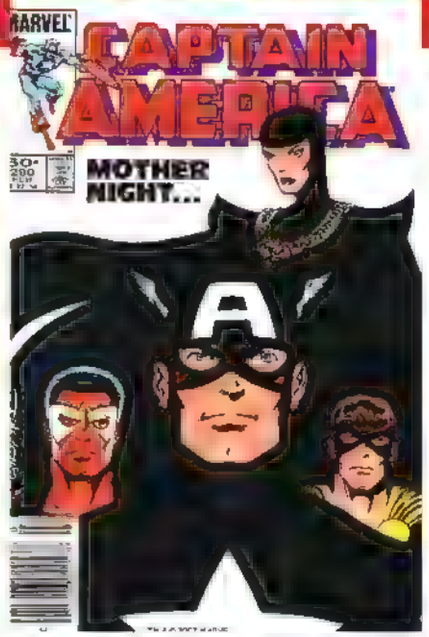
1941 Star-Spangled Kid
National Comics/DC
Co-created by *Superman*'s Jerry Siegel, this Nazi spy-fighter was – uniquely – a teen hero with an adult sidekick; both were unpowered acrobats with a car/plane thing called the Star Rocket Racer.

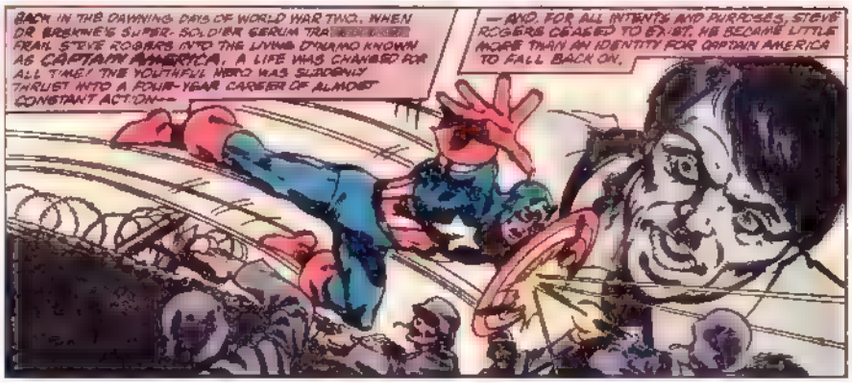
1941 Fighting Yank
Nedor Comics/DC/ Dynamite
Given a magic cloak by the ghost of his War of Independence-era ancestor, Bruce Carter gains super-strength and invulnerability; then dons a tri-corner hat et al and fights Nazis.

1941 Captain Flag
MLJ/Archie Comics
Rescued from saboteurs by a giant American Eagle, playboy Tom Townsend is taken to a mountaintop, where the healthy air makes him a superman; later he wears a flag costume and teams with his rescuer to fight Nazis.

NIGHTSHADE IS DEADLIER THE SECOND TIME AROUND!
IF YOU FAILED TO PURCHASE LAST ISSUE YOU MERELY MISSED A DRAMATIC NEW CHAPTER IN THE LIVES OF CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON! WE CAUTION YOU!
DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN!!



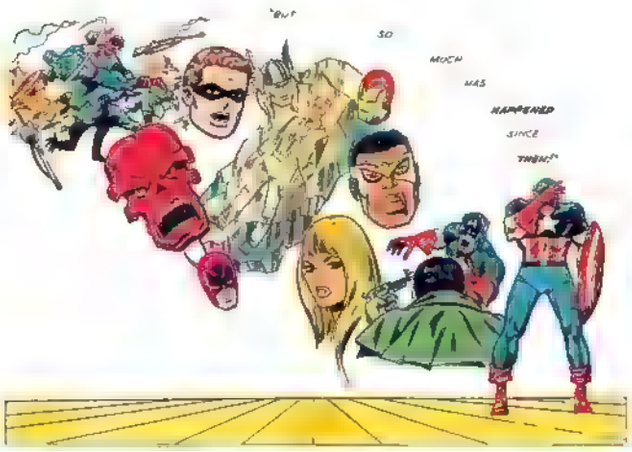



BACK IN THE DAWNING DAYS OF WORLD WAR TWO, WHEN DR ERSKINE'S SUPER-SOLDIER SERUM TRANSFORMED FRAIL STEVE ROGERS INTO THE LIVING DYNAMO KNOWN AS CAPTAIN AMERICA, A LIFE WAS CHANGED FOR ALL TIME! THE YOUTHFUL HERO WAS SUDDENLY THRUST INTO A FOUR-YEAR CAREER OF ALMOST CONSTANT ACTION—
—AND, FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, STEVE ROGERS CEASED TO EXIST. HE BECAME LITTLE MORE THAN AN IDENTITY FOR CAPTAIN AMERICA TO FALL BACK ON.

Death itself, who he had Stephen Strange battling by 1974! Instead they should be believable, and torn from-the headlines. He found the perfect example in the sullied real life President, Richard Nixon.

Englehart's predecessor on the strip, Gary Friedrich, had got things going with an extended race riot storyline that did one of the things Marvel fans liked best – it pulled all the company's disparate strands together. Friedrich had shown how regular SHIELD (and Cap) bad guys HYDRA were linked to all the company's other criminal organisations and private armies. Supreme Hydra was the Kingpin's son, and the Red Skull controlled them both – and now, in an America of Watergate, assassination

Above: Cap and his SHIELD colleagues get possessed by the dead v Nightshade in #90
Right: John Byrne penc s in #252



conspiracies and Pentagon leaks – secret links and behind the-scenes deals had a new cultural cachet. Englehart leapt aboard the trend with glee, and by the time *Three Days Of The Condor* and *All The President's Men* were packing them in at the cinemas, *Captain America* was wading waste-deep through Marvel's secret history.

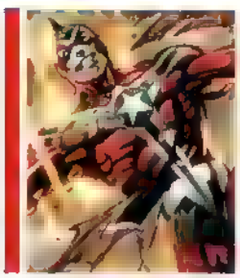
First off, was there a way Englehart could deal with a major continuity problem? He rather thought there was. Stan and Jack's dramatic reintroduction of Cap 10 years earlier had quietly ignored the fact that Timely had published all those Captain America stories in the early '50s too. But how could this guy have been asleep since 1944 when all evidence said otherwise?

Englehart explained it with a new hero – a right-wing, McCarthy-ite loon who'd been the Cap of those years – and now he was back, convinced the real Cap was some '70s, Commie-loving fake. And then, even better, came Cap's Watergate story, influenced by the scandal that was setting newspapers alight. Turns out that not only was the real world President Nixon a crook, but his fictional Marvel U counterpart was yet worse, eventually revealed as the ultimate, hidden boss of the evil "Secret Empire"[7]. Though conclusive evidence for this is deftly kept off-camera, it's more than strongly implied – Englehart had to deny it was Nixon until he was blue in the face to get Marvel to print it, so the story goes, then immediately came clean about his real intentions – and Cap's whole belief system was thrown into turmoil. Soon he's resigning as a hero, even quitting his own series – sidekick Falon took the weight before returning as a new hero, Nomad, "a man without a country".

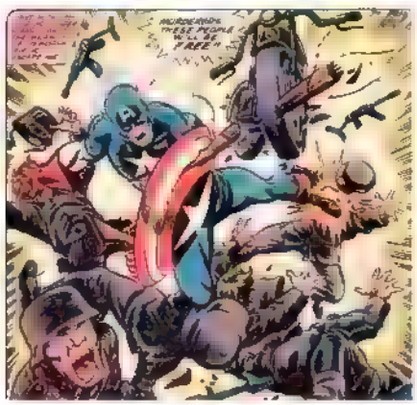
With such rich meat to play with, it's little wonder that the smart fans now saw *Cap* as Marvel's most exciting book, and the one most heaving with possibility[8]. The *laissez faire*, barely editorially controlled Marvel of the period hadn't always turned out stunning work, but here

1943 Miss America
Timely Comics/Marvel
Seemingly forgetting all about the Quality Miss America, Timely created one too: heiress Madeline Joyce, who gained powers after a lightning strike. Occasionally she wears glasses, which is rare for a superhero.

1954 Fighting American
Crestwood Publications
Captain America – remove the shield, add an eagle to his forehead – reinvented as an almost *Mad Magazine* parody by Kirby and Simon.



1978 Commander Steel
DC
New WW2 hero, created in the late '70s by Gerry Conway and Don Heck; he was saved from saboteur-inflicted injury by the fitment of lots of metal parts, giving him super-strength et al.



it really had comics had rarely been so bold and the comic-reading public was enthralled. It was only when a succession of replacement Caps prove a danger to themselves one gets himself killed in *CA* #183 that the real deal would eventually return to his red white-and blues, and fans were left breathless. For the first time since the war years, *Cap* was vying for position as Marvel's top title and it was largely through the power of the writer, not the artist. In another way, Cap was changing the way we thought about comics.

1975-2014: HERO REBORN

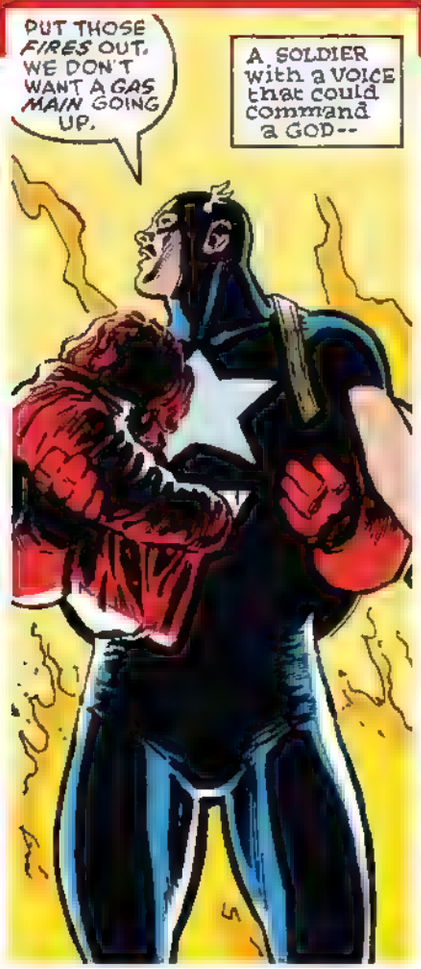
Things move on, and with Englehart gone everyone wondered what direction *Captain America* would take. The last thing they expected, however, is what they got Jack Kirby's 1975 return to Marvel, following his DC adventures with the *New Gods* et al.

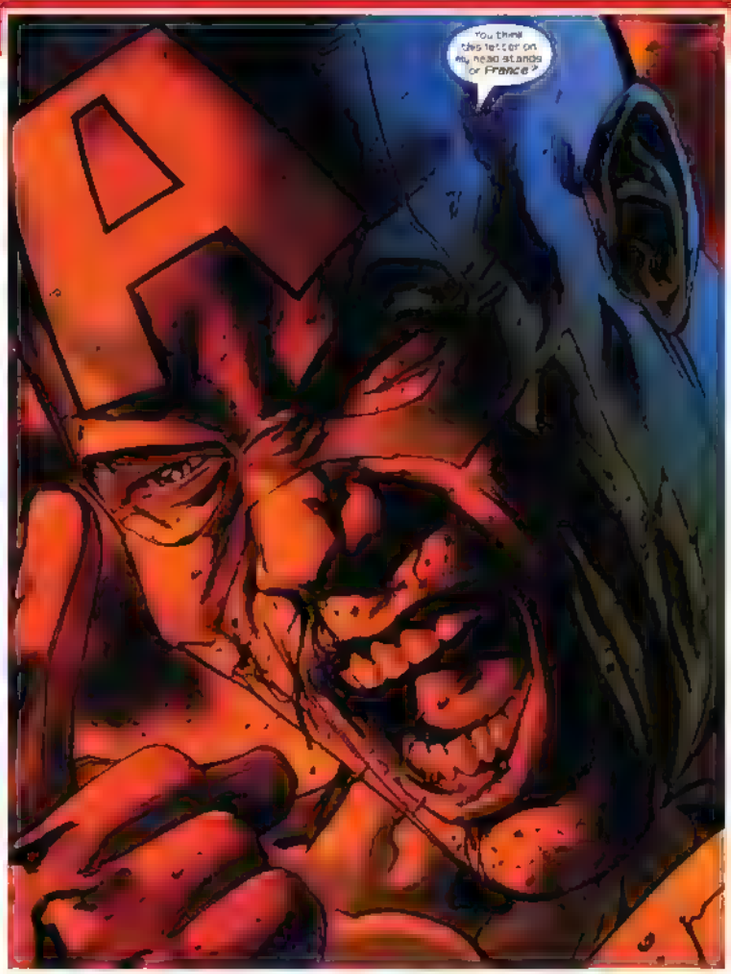
Truth to tell, everyone was a bit confused. Comics were, as ever, lurching »

1984 Major Victory
DC
Heads up the Force of July, an ultra-patriotic superteam including Lady Liberty, Mayflower, Silent Majority et al.

1986 US Agent
Marvel
This bad tempered, bad attitude almost-hero started as a villain called Super-Patriot, but has since become slightly more likeable

1986 Nuke
Marvel
Mildly bionic, borderline insane American superagent, used for CIA dirty missions abroad, and revealed as a semi-failed product of the Weapon Plus program. Has the American flag tattooed on his face.





into crisis - this time through a lack of bankable talent as much as anything. The old creators - and Kirby was definitely one of those - were out of favour, and the new guys (Adams, Steranko, Brunner) were hot, but seemingly determined to quit comics almost as soon as they'd arrived. And the audience was changing, leaving Jack seemingly stumped, unsure quite what to do. His '60s style - so full of vigorous action and invention - seemed out of step with what college age readers wanted, and his return to *Cap* came across as random, unfocused, even childish. Stubbornly ignoring all recent developments - indeed, everything that'd happened since Kirby was last at Marvel - the old master ploughed ahead with adventures that seemed set in a different universe from the rest of the Marvel line. The Kirby Cap seemed more black and white - or, perhaps, more red, white and blue - than the times demanded.

Above right: Bryan Hitch's Cap: this Super Soldier's not big on surrendering.
Below: Ron Garney's Captain America in the Mark Waid penned #445.

Quietly, but in a rising tide, fans, Marvel editors and fellow pros alike started to mock the efforts of the man who'd given them everything, and - for all his unabated energy - Kirby failed to make his case; his Falcon became a Blaxploitation cut-out, and by the time Jack was forced or persuaded off the book, no one knew what to do with Marvel's oldest, most patriotic hero.

What followed was a mixed bag. In the Jim Shooter '80s, lots of artists and writers got a stab at Cap, few memorably. The best issues were by writer Roger Stern and artist John Byrne - they lasted less than a year, but gave Steve Rogers something approaching a personality at last[91] and brought Nazi fighting again to the fore, while reinvigorating a rogue's gallery of bizarre (even silly) but memorable villains. When they left in a huff - apparently protesting a new Shooter rule that no story should run for longer than two issues - it was seen as a tragedy, and it's true that the book had rarely been so good.

The relentlessly upbeat writer, editor Mark Gruenwald - who loved *Captain America* almost as much as he adored his other baby, *The Official Handbook Of The Marvel Universe* - was, in contrast, far more committed, offering up 10 whole years of story, the longest run the character has ever enjoyed. This Cap loses his Super-Soldier abilities for a while, once again quits - this time his new secret identity is simply "The Captain" - and battles his official replacement, who eventually becomes an unpleasant semi-hero called US Agent.

In the 1990s, the ridiculous *Heroes Reborn* fiasco - Jim Lee and Rob Liefeld, one-time star Marvel artists now asked to reinvent core heroes, including Cap - resulted in some of the most

1991 General Glory
DC
Captain America parody, who bangs on about patriotism, and is really a frail 80-year-old man with a sidekick called "Ernie the Battling Boy".

1997 Agent America
Awesome Comics
Rob Liefeld's ill-starred, never-published new patriotic character, created to annoy everyone when he was ousted from both Image and Marvel. Abandoned following threatened legal action.

1999 First American
America's Best Comics/ Wildstorm
Satirical take on the patriotic hero by Alan Moore and Jim Baikie for ABC's *Tomorrow Stories* anthology; more Fighting American than Cap, he has no obvious super-powers and little skill.

Brubaker's Captain America introduced new villains and resurrected Bucky.

embarrassingly awful *Captain America* tales ever created, but the last decade of Cap tales have been arguably the Star Spangled Avenger's most sustained moment of glory to date.

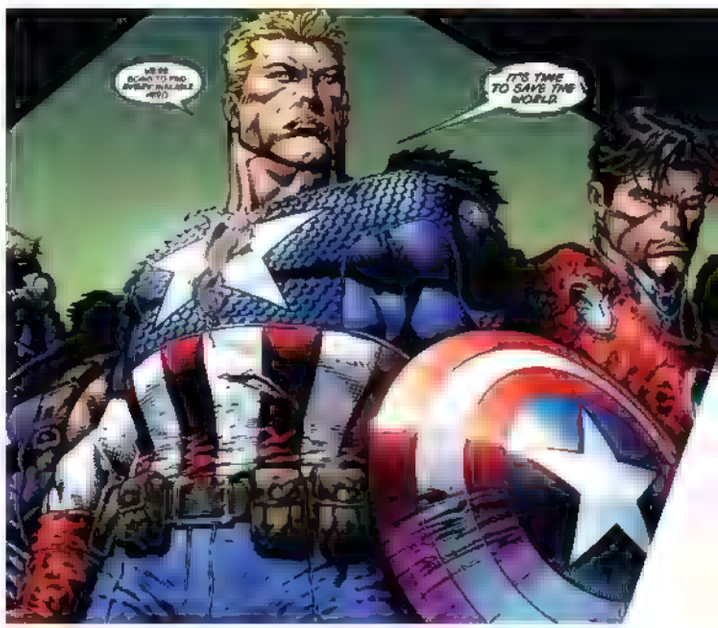
Under writer Ed Brubaker – with his crime story background – and such excellent, realistic, relatively low key artists as Steve Epting, Michael Lark and Mike Perkins, *Captain America* became a convoluted, masterfully paced spy story cum-techno thriller, told in bitter Cold War greys, browns and blues. It both killed Cap and brought his long dead WW2 buddy Bucky back to life in compelling, believable fashion, and remains one of the real triumphs of recent Marvel.

Meanwhile, with two Captain America movies – the upcoming one, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, is both based on the Brubaker run and promises a '70s conspiracy thriller vibe – and his *Avengers* film appearances all pushing the character to hitherto-unenjoyed prominence, the character's future looks secure.

Be it *Civil War*, *Secret Invasion* or *Avengers vs X-Men*, Cap is generally at the centre of it all, takes decisive final action, and is our moral centre – whatever side Cap's on, you can be sure that's the one the creators want you to agree with, no matter how muddy the waters become.

The message is simple: America might be broken, but Captain America never is. There's hope to be found there somewhere. CH

***Captain America: The Winter Soldier** is released in the UK on 28 March*



2002
Ultimate Captain America
Marvel
Same as the original, but tougher, less compromising, and no fan of the fold-over pirate boot.

Whatever side Cap's on, you can be sure that's the one the creators want you to agree with

Photos © Mauricio Mozzane www.mozzanephotography.com

Return Of The Spymaster

While *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is based on his classic storyline, Ed Brubaker is busy creating his own espionage tales. In the UK for the Lakes International Comic Art Festival, Brubaker and his right-hand man Sean Phillips talk to **Stephen Jewell** about superspies

images © Marvel, DC and respective copyright holders

“I don’t think Dickens told people how long *Oliver Twist* was going to be”

Never let it be said that *Comic Heroes* doesn t know how to make itself useful. Sitting between Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips in the back room of Gosh Comics just before their signing at the Soho comic book emporium, we fire questions at the long time creative partners while passing along copies of their hit series *Fatale* and *Criminal* and sundry collections of *Captain America*, *Sleeper* and *Gotham Central* for the pair to scribble their signatures upon. Brubaker does most of the talking, with Phillips content to listen as he elaborates on the thematic subtext of their mutual collaborations. “I m glad that Sean knows that I put so much thought into it,” laughs Brubaker. “There s layers of meaning in everything. There's never a word that's there by accident.”

“It s all new to me,” Phillips admits, after one particularly fascinating detail. “No wonder it takes you so long to write. But I put stuff in there as well in the same way that Ed does. Visual things that he puts in the script or something that I might happen to see that fits in there. We do that quite a lot but I'm not so well versed in that kind of stuff as Ed is.”

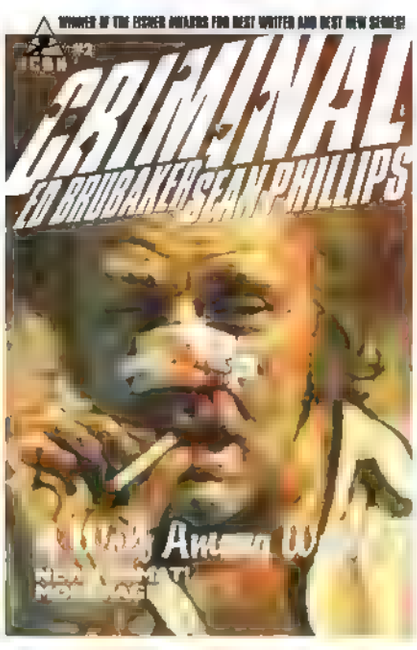
Last time we spoke to him, the LA based Brubaker recalled that he had been collaborating with Phillips longer than he had known his wife, a working relationship that dates back to 1999 when Phillips, who lives in Lancaster, inked the last three issues of the Michael Lark-penciled Vertigo four-parter, *Scene Of The Crime*.

The pair teamed up again on 2003 Wildstorm superhero thriller, *Sleeper*. But it wasn't until they released *Coward*, the first volume of their acclaimed creator-owned series *Criminal*, through Marvel's boutique imprint Icon in 2006, that they really began to develop the instinctive rapport that serves them so well today. After publishing five more salvos in the *Criminal* saga and two instalments of offbeat superhero series *Incognito* through the House of Ideas, Brubaker and Phillips switched camps to Image Comics in early 2012. Their most ambitious project yet, *Fatale* has proved to be their most successful undertaking to date, so much so that what was originally announced as a 12-issue maxiseries now apparently has no end in sight.

Top left: Brubaker has been working with Sean Phillips for almost 15 years. **Above left:** *Velvet*. Cold War espionage with *Captain America* collaborator Steve Epting. **Above right:** Brubaker and Butch Guice's *Winter Soldier*.

FATALE ATTRACTION

“We decided to stop saying how long it is because that doesn't help sales,” says Brubaker. “Also I don't think Charles Dickens told people ahead of time how many chapters *Oliver Twist* was going to be. But honestly, once I realised that the book was selling so well and was the most popular thing we've done, I had the revelation that I now have the freedom to do whatever I want. I would never have done the third book, *West Of Hell*, with the four short stories, if I'd been worried about trying to wrap it up sooner. Image has said, 'Just make it as long as it needs to be, don't worry about the length and just write it as you're writing it now.' So I just think of it as like an epic. Sean and I know where it s going to end but we won't tell anybody.” »



"We'd like to think that readers couldn't wait to buy the next issue," adds Phillips. "We'd feel that we'd failed if they were like, 'Oh, I'm going to wait six months for the collected edition' "

Inspired by the infinite possibilities of *Sandman*'s fantastical canvas or the otherworldly realms of Stephen King's vast novels, *Fatale*'s supernatural noir criss-crosses several decades of the past century providing Brubaker with an even larger canvas than *Criminal*, which was mostly composed of standalone tales. "It's designed that way," he explains. "That's the thing that we liked about *Criminal*, as each series was a different story and a different type of crime story with different characters, and sometimes different time periods. Sometimes they were completely different from what we'd done before such as with [last volume] *The Last Of The Innocent* which in a lot of ways was more like an alternative comic than a crime comic *Criminal* gave us a kind of umbrella to do what we wanted and with *Fatale* most of the storylines, although there's some modern stuff in there as well, are set in different eras so you can do different kinds of noir horror in different eras of American history. It's not like doing the same thing over and over again."

Top left: The secretary of an intelligence agency boss is revealed to be a super-spy in *Velvet*
Top right: Bucky Barnes and Black Widow strike a *Mr & Mrs Smith* style pose
Above: The Eisner award winning *Criminal*

> **"I'd always wanted to do some kind of pulp horror"**

After *The Last Of The Innocent* scooped the 2012 Eisner for Best Limited Series, Brubaker and Phillips opted to take *Criminal* out on a high, at least for now. "I just felt that we needed to do something that was a little bit different to what we'd done before but still felt like our stuff," says Brubaker. "Something that gave us more room to play, to be experimental and to bring in elements of fantasy or the supernatural. I'd never done anything like that before, although Sean, of course, had drawn *Hellblazer* in his youth."

And as Phillips jokes, it gives Brubaker some much-needed breathing space to pen a *Criminal* storyline that somehow tops *The Last Of The Innocent*. "How do you beat that?" laughs Brubaker. "I'd always wanted to do some kind of pulp horror but I just hadn't got the hook for it. But for a long time, I'd been mulling over the idea about a femme fatale who was the sympathetic lead instead of the plot lynchpin."

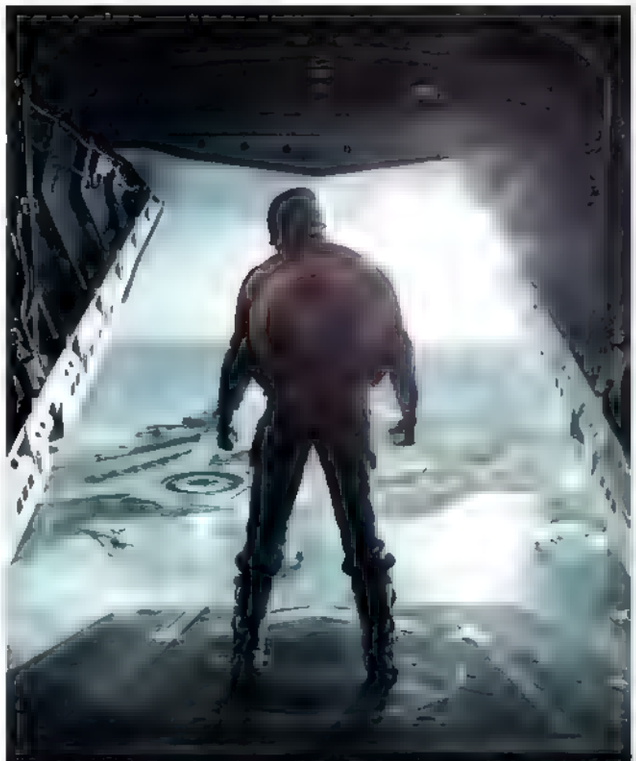
Apart from sinister villain Sommerset, the enigmatic, seemingly immortal fatale Josephine is the only constant element that runs through the various arcs. "I like the fact that we haven't defined what she is yet and I don't think we will ever completely define it," says Brubaker. "It's hinted at a lot that she's an inspiration for people, which was inspired partly by Tim Powers's

SO WHAT IS IT THAT I KNOW?
I KNOW THAT, AS NICE A TRIBUTE AS THIS PLACE IS TO STEVE, TONY STARK IS FULL OF CRAP
THAT AIN'T CAP'S SHIELD
BECAUSE IF I'M SEEING ALMOST HALF A DOZEN WAYS TO GET IN AND OUT WITH IT IT'S GOT TO BE A REPLICA
WHICH MEANS THIS LADY'S POP WASN'T THE ONLY ONE LYING ABOUT CAP
SURE THEY'LL WAIT A YEAR OR TWO THEN THEY'LL SAY THE PUBLIC IS CRYING FOR A NEW CAPTAIN AMERICA MAYBE STARK WILL EVEN CLONE HIM LIKE HE DID WITH THOR.
STARK SAYS NO ONE ELSE WILL CARRY THE SHIELD OR WEAR THE MASK BUT WE CAN'T BE TRUSTED
BUT AS LONG AS THEY HAVE STEVE'S SHIELD THEY WON'T JUST BE ABLE TO LET IT SIT ON A SHELF NOT FOR LONG
AND I'M NOT LETTING ANYONE ELSE CARRY IT UNLESS HE'S WORTHY
WELL I WAS LOOKING FOR A WAY TO MAKE MY FIRST MOVE
MIGHT AS WELL START WITH THIS
Brubaker injected a dose of reality into *Captain America*.

idea (in his 1989 novel *The Stress Of Her Regard*) of mixing a succubus and the muse I thought, 'What if somebody was so sexually charged that they inspire not just murder but also creation!'"

Apparently irresistible to the opposite sex, Jo's siren like abilities often result in devastating consequences. "A lot of it is about the treatment of women as objects,' Brubaker continues. "The idea of the femme fatale in a lot of noir fiction is that she's an object of desire that makes men destroy themselves, but she's usually the bad guy. One of the things that led me to *Fatale* was the idea of combining something like *Double Indemnity* with *Rosemary's Baby*. 'What if you hired an insurance salesman to kill your husband because he was trying to impregnate you with the devil's baby!' I then started thinking about the kind of horror I like. My favourite film is *The Devil Rides Out*, which the devil is clearly in. There's also a lot of weird cult stuff in America, which we touched on in the second book, *The Devil's Business*, which was set in the '70s, that sort of Charles Manson era. The thing I liked most about HP Lovecraft is that the people who believed in Necronomicon and Cthulhu were scarier than what was actually happening. The idea that there were these secret cults obsessed with this ancient knowledge was really scary. You'd never see an atheist fly a plane into a building because there are no 72 virgins on the other end. But you might see a guy try to end the world so that he can bring Cthulhu back."

Beginning in this month's *Fatale* #20, Book Five takes place in the present as contemporary protagonist Nicolas Lash finally catches up with the elusive Jo. "It's going to be told in a completely different way to what has gone before," reveals Brubaker. "It doesn't flash back in the same way that the others did and we're going to learn a lot more secrets. Jo had amnesia for most of the fourth book, which was another noir trope that I wanted to play with. The »



The Winter Soldier Goes Widescreen

So is the writer of the original comic optimistic about the movie version that we'll see in *Captain America 2*?

Comic Heroes: Are you looking forward to *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*?
Ed Brubaker: "I'm psyched! I got to read the script and went out to dinner with the directors Anthony and Joe Russo. I'm also friends with the screenwriters, Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, as I met them while they were making the first *Captain America* movie. I have total faith in all of them and they've done a really great job. I got to go out to the set for about a week, watched some scenes being filmed and got to meet Robert Redford, who's playing SHIELD agent Alexander Pierce."

CH: Were you impressed by what you saw?
EB: "If everything comes out as good as it seems, it's going to be the best superhero movie ever made. I can't think of one that would be better and I count it up there with the *Dark Knight Trilogy*. It's really just a thriller and the fact that it's a superhero movie is almost superfluous. It doesn't feel like the *Avengers* movie, it feels more like something like *Three Days Of The Condor* or *Mission Impossible*. It's got a really great tone to it and the way they've filmed the action is so exciting."

CH: What's your verdict on Sebastian Stan, who played Bucky Barnes in *The First Avenger* and has now stepped up to take on *The Winter Soldier* as well?
EB: "He's really got into it. He's read all the comics already and spent the last year prepping by just immersing himself in Cold War history, to the point where he would comment on some of the stuff about the origin of the Winter Soldier that I put in the comic. He'd say, 'Did you know that there really was a General assassinated back then?' and I'd say, 'Yes, that's what I based it on – I took actual moments of history and put him into them.' He was so into the ride and you couldn't ask for more."

HOW -- HOW DID YOU GET PAST THE DESK SERGEANT?
HOW DO YOU THINK?
I NEEDED TO SEE YOU.
THOUGHT I WAS THE LAST THING YOU WANTED TO SEE.
STOP IT.
I HAD TO PROTECT MYSELF.

person that you saw her become after the end of the first storyline was a victim who was on the run, but at the end of the second book she was a woman who was tired of being a victim. So you'll learn more about what happened to her in the interim and also what she did from the late '70s up until modern times. She's got a whole different world around her and she's definitely taking control of her own destiny and that's been her path through the whole story."

In cahoots with his former *Captain America* foil Steve Epting, Brubaker has recently added a second title to his Image portfolio in the form of '70s spy thriller *Velvet*. "I forgot how hard it is to launch a first issue of something brand new," he admits. "Sean and I have been working together for so long that I instinctively know how to begin our stories. I know that we have a fanbase, a readership, that follows us from book to book every time and it seems to grow 10 to 20 per cent every project. I stressed out a lot more with *Velvet* as I got about 10 pages into the first script and then went back and started all over again. The last time that I did a first issue for Steve, it was in the Marvel Universe so I didn't have to introduce all the characters. I could do one panel reminders but you can't do that in a new original thing."

Having collaborated on the *Winter Soldier* arc upon which *Captain America 2* is based, Brubaker and Epting are taking full advantage of the Marvel blockbuster's imminent arrival, releasing the first *Velvet* trade paperback at about the same time. With both stories tapping into the stylistic conceits of the espionage genre, Brubaker admits that the Image title boasts a similar sensibility to his near seven-year stint on the Star-Spangled Avenger's monthly adventures.

Above Josephine is the archetypal femme fatale – but one we sympathise with rather than fear

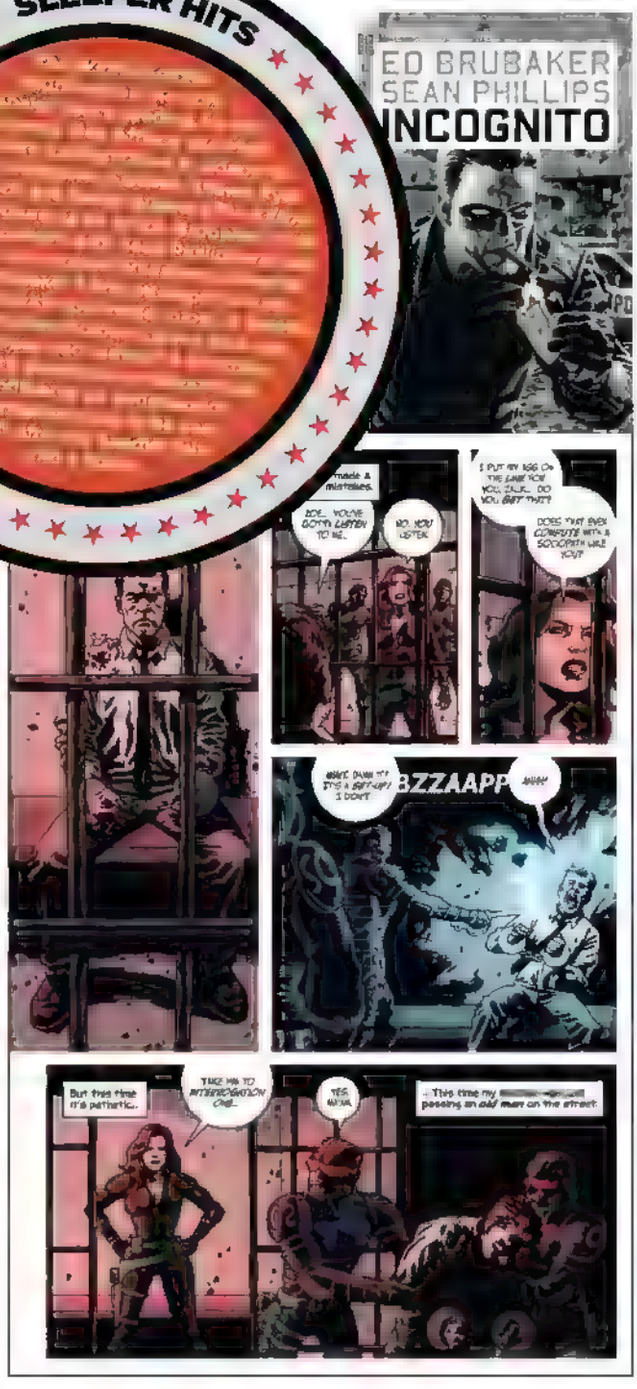
REALITY BITES

"What I did on *Cap* was the same thing that Jim Steranko had done way back in the day, which was to add an element of the Bond films or something like *24*," he reasons. "That was what made it stand out from what had been coming out before that, the fact that even though it's a guy running around in a superhero costume it felt very much like it had a grounded realism to it, which was down to the way Steranko draws. In that way, *Velvet* is similar to what we did on *Captain America* because it touches on some of the same subject matter. I told Steve that if we succeed, it'll be like if at some point John le Carré had been desperate enough for cash that he'd been hired to do a Bond knock off, so it will hopefully find the middle ground between the realism of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *Mission Impossible*."

So while you can still expect to see comic book style fight sequences, Brubaker is determined that the pivotal moments will have very real consequences. "To make it work, we decided that we could have these heightened, exciting violent scenes but if someone gets thrown off the top of a moving train and hits the ground, they are dead," he insists. "You get to see their bones ripped out of their body as you would in real life. I want there to be ultra-violence but I don't want the results of it to be glorified. You see that in the first few pages of the first issue, when Jefferson Keller is shot and his face is basically blown off and he doesn't peel off a bulletproof face after that."

Initially set in London, the ongoing monthly follows X-Ops secretary Velvet Templeton, who reveals that she is more than a mere pen-pusher when she is forced to flee after uncovering the secret truth behind the murder of a top agent. "I had the inspiration for the story while watching a marathon of old spy movies such as *In Like Flynn*, *Matt Helm* and the old *Bond* movies. Even Roger Moore's, which I loved as a kid and have utter distaste for as an adult. I'm

SLEEPER HITS
But it couldn't be true, and I couldn't be the only one who thought that
WE BOTH KNEW THAT WAS
HE WAS NOT A TRAITOR
I'D LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO AGREE WITH YOU, TEMPLETON, BUT FRANK'S BEEN RETIRED TEN YEARS
AND WE'VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENS TO SPIES WHEN THEY LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO GET OLD
THEY GET BITTER. THEY DRINK TOO MUCH. AND FRANK WAS NO SAINT TO BEGIN WITH
I HATE TO SAY IT, BUT I'VE SEEN BETTER MEN TURNED
AS HAVE YOU



one of those people who likes *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and there was a scene near the end when Bond marries Emma Peel [Diana Rigg playing Countess Tracy di Vicenzo] and when they drive off Moneypenny is standing there crying. I'm like, 'That's bullshit!' Moneypenny is probably the second most important person in MI6 after M. She knows all the shit that M knows and also all the stuff that he doesn't because she weaves out what he doesn't need to know. So I thought, 'What if there was a secret history to that type of character?'"

Indeed rather than superheroic operatives like Black Widow, Velvet Templeton more closely resembles female espionage agents such as John Steed's fellow UK Avenger Emma Peel, Modesty Blaise and *Danger Diabolik*'s Eva Kant.

"I just did the thing that I always do, which is to concentrate on the people on the periphery, who are always more interesting than the hero," explains Brubaker. "If you read my *Captain America*, Steve Rogers is in there but everybody else is more interesting than him. The book is really about Bucky, Sharon Carter and everybody else in that world. It's not about him. That's how I approach things so the idea of finding a path into a Cold War mystery that way was really exciting for me. I've read a lot of Cold War spy stuff, my dad was in the CIA for 21 years and he was an intelligence officer during the Cold War. I know a lot about that era but I've read very few books where the main character is a female spy, so I liked the idea of taking the history of someone who appears to just be the secretary but has actually got a lot of experience in the field. 'What happened to her and why is she on a desk now?' That, for me, is where the story came from."

Having departed the House of Ideas after last January's *Winter Soldier* #14, Brubaker is thriving on the opportunity to concentrate on his own properties. "I always felt like I mostly had freedom while I was doing the Marvel stuff," he says. "The main reason why I quit wasn't anything to do with not owning what I did, I'd just been writing superhero comics for the majority of the past 14 years and I'd done about 500 issues, so I just didn't have any more ideas. I just felt like I'd done it all, and I'd done it so many times that there was no way to do it anymore without repeating myself. I just wanted to try something different. Sean and I had been doing well enough on *Fatale* and I had some movie and TV stuff that I hadn't had time to do before. I just thought if I've got enough work to see me through, and if I devote the time I was devoting to Marvel to screenwriting and my own creator-owned projects, I'd be a lot happier." **CH**

"The people on the periphery are always more interesting"

Above left: Velvet Templeton: more dangerous than she looks
Above right: *Incognito* introduced superpowered ex-villain Zack Overkill

Fatale *and* ***Velvet*** *are published monthly by Image,* ***Velvet*** *is reviewed on page 114.* ***Captain America: The Winter Soldier*** *is published in a new deluxe hardback edition, with a new introduction and afterword by Ed Brubaker, on 11 March*

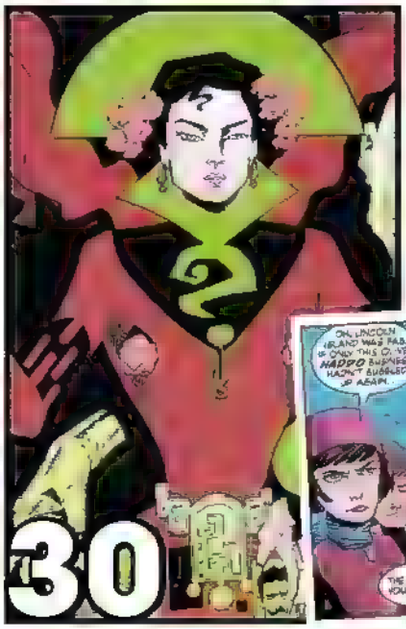
TOP SECRET AGENTS

SUPERSPIES

Being a superhero? Yeah, it's okay – for an amateur. But a superspy? Now you're talking! **Matt Bielby** introduces 30 two-faced, hard-edged comic book heroes who take their adventuring very seriously...

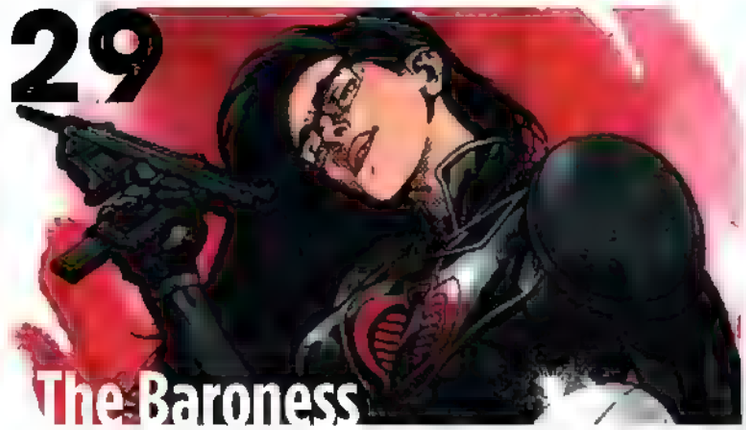
Meet the greatest superspies from the world of comics*, some with powers, others not, but all working for this government or that, each with a ruthless streak and a lot of sneak, and every one of them armed to the teeth and ready to do what it takes for President, Queen and country

* From Sam Fisher and his mates as de- because SHIELD agents get a chance to shine elsewhere this issue



Mina Murray

She's a little bit vampirey, yes, and a proto-superhero. But in Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Mina Harker née Murray – protagonist of Dracula, now again using her maiden name – is first and foremost an agent of the Crown, recruited by Campion Bond of British Intelligence to put together a team to protect the Empire against Devil Doctors and Martian Invasion. Prim and buttoned-up she may be, but she's also the right woman in the right place at the right time.



The Baroness

Marvel ran its *GI Joe: A Real American* hero comic series from 1982-94, tied-in with the Hasbro toy line and a couple of TV series, it told surprisingly complicated, character-led stories – considering it was all about an unlikely elite unit battling theatrical terrorists Cobra, a Marvel invention clearly based on SHIELD'S HYDRA. Many of the major characters were extensively expanded upon by the comics, but some were totally original creations, including sexy baddie the Baroness, who was on the page long before she was ever an action figure.

Peter Wisdom

There's a touch of the Mary Sue to this mutant British Secret Service agent, an Essex rebel with "hot knife" energy powers, introduced by Warren Ellis in *Excalibur* and soon proving to be tougher, cooler, more ruthless and competent than any of the so-called leads; by the time of *Captain Britain And MI 13*, he was a more self-regarding British Nick Fury, leading the defence against vampire invaders. A polarising character for him not to be infuriating he has to be written very deftly indeed.

Sasha Bordeaux

One-time *Batman* supporting character, created by *Queen & Country*'s Greg Rucka, and who's twice worked for government spy agency Checkmate; she's been turned into a cyborg, shows increasing "ends justify the means" attitudes, and enjoys on-off romance with superhero Mr Terrific. Consider her DC's answer to SHIELD's Maria Hill.

Meru

In Matt Kindt's Dark Horse series *MIND MGMT*, true crime writer Meru soon finds herself caught up in a bizarre world of superspies and psychic abilities. All along, Meru is manipulated by retired psychic super-agent Henry Lyme, who needs her help in taking down his old agency, MIND MGMT, which he believes to be out of control. Ever-twisting, with a film promised, and building an audience issue-by-issue, this is one to watch.

Casanova Quinn

Created by Matt Fraction and Gabriel Bá for their ongoing Image Comics series *Casanova*, our super-thief hero gets blackmailed into working as a double-agent in a vast, complex alternative universe jumping espionage game; his dad runs spy outfit EMPIRE, his twin-sister is their top agent, and evil outfit WASTE (a Thomas Pynchon reference) are ... well, it's too complicated to go into here. The whole thing stumbled when key creators went on to other projects, but a restart is promised soon, making this the perfect time to jump on board. »

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Evelyn Cream

About to become familiar to a whole new generation of fans with Marvel's luxury reprints of Alan Moore's *Marvelman/Miracleman* strip, the grinning Evelyn Cream is as chilling a freelance government agent as you'll find. A hulking black man with sapphires for teeth in the employ of Sir Dennis Archer of The Spookshow, he's hired to track down and kill our hero's alter-ego, Mike Moran. But what other agendas are in play...?

Donald Duck

What's that, you say? Disney's idle, irritable fowl a secret agent? But yes. Donald had quite a comic book career from the '40s onwards, initially under cartoonist Carl Barks, who developed the character beyond anything seen in the animated films, this Donald talked more and quacked less, and swung between hero, villain and average Joe as stories demanded.

The ongoing Paperon Intelligence Agency tales are in this tradition, here Donald (codename Qu Qu 7, it makes sense in Italian) and Fethry Duck are secret agents working for spymaster Scrooge McDuck. As the codename joke above may suggest, these relentlessly silly tales were first created in '60s Italy for European audiences.

Dynamo, THUNDER Agent

Numerous characters who look like superheroes actually operate more like secret agents – what else is Cap, while working for SHIELD? – but only one group were designed this way from the off: Tower Comics' THUNDER Agents of the mid-'60s, three superheroes presented as everyday Joes with a day job that just happened to involve spying for The Higher United Nations Defence Enforcement Reserves. The three initial super-agents – Dynamo, NoMan and Menthor – are aided by the non-powered THUNDER Squad, in action against villains like SPIDER (Secret People's International Directorate for Extralegal Revenue, believe it or not). Within the first 10 issues a hero would die and a number of new super-agents arrive, there have been a half dozen revivals over the years, and from as many publishers.

Holden Carver

The inky, scratchy, yet totally controlled noir look of Sean Phillips's art creates, in Wildstorm series *Sleeper*, a world where you totally believe writer Ed Brubaker's unlucky Holden Carver – an International Operations agent deep undercover in supervillain Tao's criminal outfit – can trust no one. In time he turns and becomes a true criminal, but Holden sees a third way – the problem is, will he be allowed to take it?

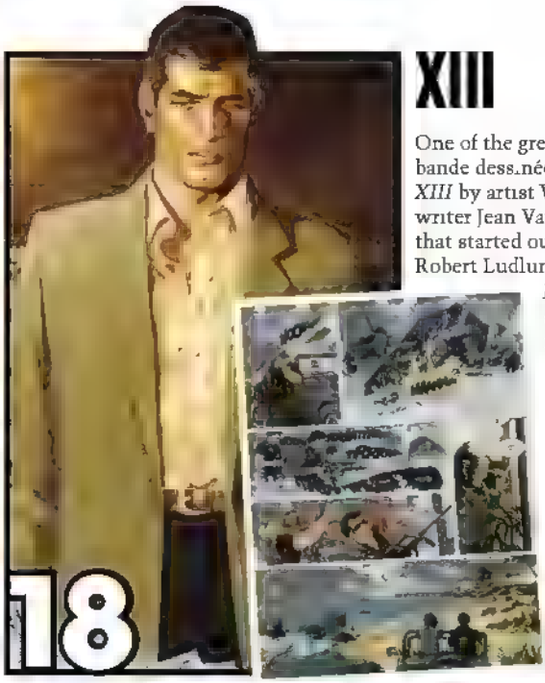
Spy vs Spy

You know these guys, even if you were never a big reader of *Mad* – the American humour mag that was the last survivor of the notorious EC Comics (and is now owned by DC). The wordless *Spy Vs Spy* strip first cropped up in 1961, the creation of exiled Cuban cartoonist Antonio Prohías. Here we have two pointy-nosed, identical, almost mouse-like spies – one in black, the other in white – of the old school anarchist type, forever running round with fizzing, bowling ball-sized bombs, keen to outwit each other. Sometimes black wins, sometimes white. An icon of the cold war, *Spy vs Spy* is simple, highly graphic and fascinating. Prohías would sign each strip in Morse code.

Charles Basildon

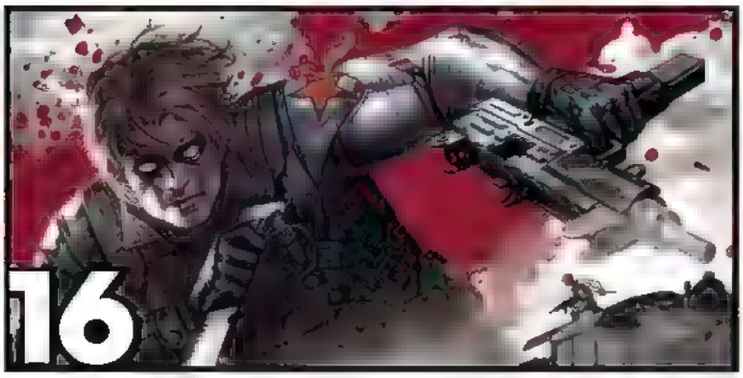
He was a 007 parody of course, created by *Comic Heroes*' very own Mike Perkins, with help from writer Tony Bedard, for CrossGen. The name of his strip – *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* – is a version of a phrase that's been lurking around the spy world since forever, and was notably used by the great John Barry for "Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang" on *Thunderball*.

The CrossGen version lasted just five issues – it was killed when the firm went under – but had great fun with the '60s spy milieu, as many have speculated about Bond, "Charles Basildon" is just a codename for MI6's reigning top spy and the current version is a bit of an amoral dirtbag whose partners keep dying on him.



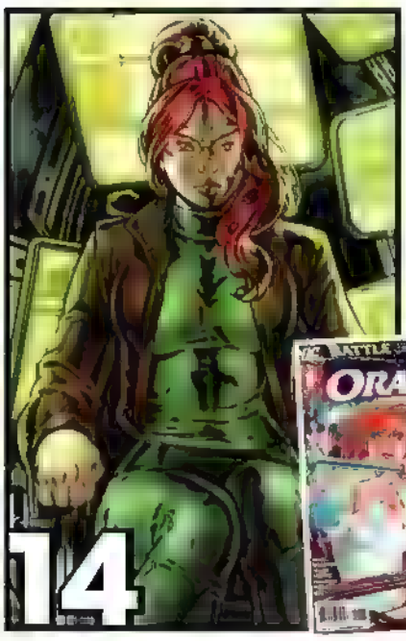
XIII

One of the greatest of all recent bande dessinée series has been *XIII* by artist William Vance and writer Jean Van Hamme, a book that started out as a take on Robert Ludlum's *The Bourne Identity* amnesiac super agent tries to find out the secrets of his past, as all parties try to kill him – but soon develops a style all of its own There are 19 volumes, released over 20 years, in the first storyline all essential and a sequel has recently begun too.



Winter Soldier

Time was when we joked about "comic book death", saying only Bucky, Jason Todd and Uncle Ben stayed down But then the first two were brought back, with Bucky Barnes turning out to have been a Soviet super-agent all along. Called "Winter Soldier", his reappearance was central to a vast spy story that ran through Cap's comic in the mid-noughties; the rehabilitated Bucky now works as an intriguing, dark superhero



Oracle

How much real spying is actually all about bag drops, secret codes, even sitting around in cars watching doorways let alone slipping into an enemy base wearing a sleek black one-piece and a ton of pouches? No, it's all Edward Snowden, Wikileaks and the NSA these days, and so a girl sitting in the dark with a bunch of computer screens is as potent an image as any, especially if she's the wheelchair bound ex Batgirl, Barbara Gordon She's more recently been given her legs and Bat-cape back, and become infinitely less interesting as a result.

James Bond

Any normal superspy list would lead with this guy, but not this one, for 007's comic book exploits are the least of his outings, patchy and sporadic if you ignore the often excellent *Daily Express* strips, which ran from 1958-1977, which we probably must as a magazine of comic *books* Sure, there are Bond comics out there (explored in our feature on page 88) Dark Horse did its best in the '90s, with miniseries such as *Serpent's Tooth* but they're generally stiff, silly and unconvincing, despite the best efforts of top creators such as Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy.

Sir Denis Nayland Smith

Steely, avuncular ex British cop and spy, obsessed with taking down Fu Manchu, and later leader of Freelance Restorations Ltd, a PI cum adventuring outfit employing Shang Chi, Clive Reston, Black Jack Tarr and others. He is, of course, a version of the Nayland Smith who was always the Devil Doctor's Van Helsing like nemesis in the original Sax Rohmer pulp novels His obsessive nature is both strength and weakness, and though he plays Shang Chi's "good" surrogate father he's not above "games of deceit and death" of his own

Amanda Waller

Comics are very poor at depicting different body types girls and boys alike generally come in skinny-and-hot or muscular-and-hot varieties so a dumpy black woman from the Chicago Pro ects really is something of a novelty Introduced in 1985, she's run the Suicide Squad and Checkmate, and though she makes no friends, and heaves with secret agendas, few would deny her effectiveness The New 52 version bosses ARGUS, but is now young and slim we can only hope she gets addicted to donuts and fast. »

Black Jack Tarr

The old *Shang Chi, Master of Kung Fu* book was perhaps the best spy comic ever made, so it should be no surprise to find a few of its regulars on this list. Black Jack Tarr was a hulking brute of a man, first introduced as "the man even kung fu can't smash."

As Sir Denis Nayland Smith's aide-de-camp, he swiftly became a friend and ally, but his gruff nature and general rudeness gave their relationship a certain edge. Tarr worked for MI6, Scotland Yard, and as part of Smith's private band of Fu Manchu-fighters, but since the end of *MOKF* has been little seen in Marvel Comics.

Clive Reston

Another *Shang Chi* regular, Clive Reston was introduced as a somewhat snobbish, pompous, even effete English agent who was nevertheless surprisingly effective in a brawl. In time he became less up-himself, and one of the most appealing and human characters in the strip – if never quite shedding the bizarre affectation that appears to see him claim to be a relative of both Sherlock Holmes and James Bond.

Though he's shown up a few times since – notably the *Wisdom* miniseries and *Captain Britain And MI 13* – Reston's career basically ended with the cancellation of *MOKF*, a terrible shame for one of Marvel's most compellingly heroes.

Captain Francis Blake

One half of *Blake And Mortimer*, Captain Francis Percy Blake is a dashing, trenchcoat favouring, ex RAF MI5 officer, in constant conflict with the evil Colonel Olrik and aided by his civilian scientist buddy, the Scottish, red haired Philip Mortimer. The famous first story – "The Secret Of The Swordfish" – told of the rise of a dastardly Eastern power called The Yellow Empire, and the battle to create a super-plane to counter it.

Blake is a master of disguise, even fooling his partner on occasion, and one of the few spies on this list to make this classic spy trick an important part of their modus operandi.

Jimmy Woo

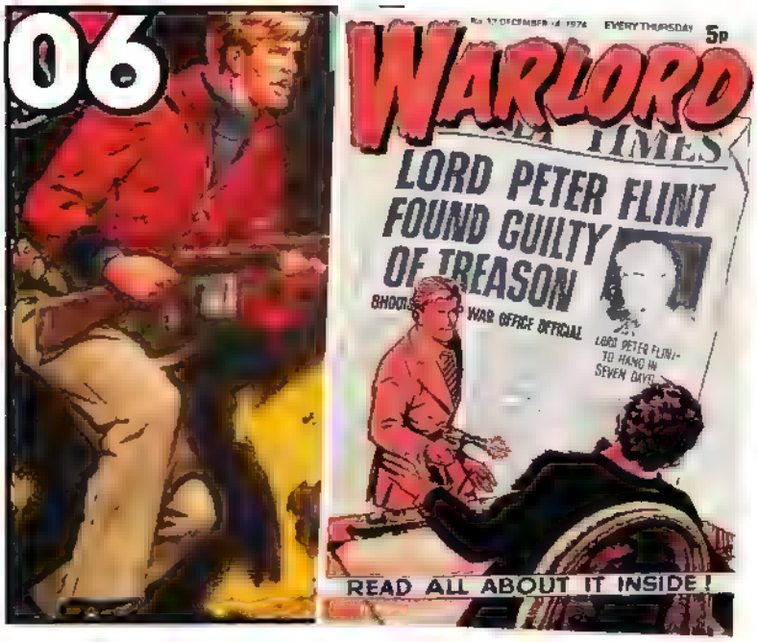
In the Jim Steranko *SHIELD* issues he appeared as a sharp-suited FBI agent in battles against a revived Yellow Claw. Of course, his history stretches back further than almost any other Marvel character, back to the company's '50s Atlas incarnation, when he was created by Al Feldstein and Joe Maneely. Designed to be the hero of the short-lived *Yellow Claw* title, his adventures were constantly complicated by a seemingly doomed love affair with Suwan, the Claw's hot grandniece.

Tara Chace

Away from the spandex and capes, the more believable world of proper espionage is rarely depicted in comics, and though the milieu of Greg Rucka's Oni Press series *Queen & Country* is hardly totally realistic, it's way closer than most. The series ran throughout the noughties, and centres on Tara Chace, an agent for the Special Operations Section of MI6. There's loads of action and betrayal, but plenty of soap opera and bureaucracy too – it's been nominated for Eisner Awards six times, and won once.

Abbey Chase

Hot chicks and secret agents – two great tastes that taste great together – have rarely been conflated with such bare-faced glee as they are in *Danger Girl*, a sort of *Charlie's Angels*-meet-Bond girl pastiche with skimpier outfits and a bigger budget, that became a hit for Wildstorm in 2001, and has bounced and juggled its way through a dozen or so miniseries and a number of one-shots in the years since. The brain chicks of writer Andy Hartnell and artist J Scott Campbell, the girls work for a freelance all female spy network, led by someone who may be a retired James Bond, and boasting Sydney Savage (vivacious Aussie) and main girl Abbey Chase (an ex-Tomb Raider) as key operatives.



Lord Peter Flint

The huge British weekly comic book hit of the mid-'70s, *Warlord*, began a combat story revival and early issues revolved around the adventures of Lord Peter Flint (Codename: Warlord), an aristocratic WW2 secret agent with a nice line in white suits, clearly modelled on Roger Moore's Bond. His cover is that he's a foppish conscientious objector, giving him something of a Scarlet Pimpernel vibe, too. His boss was the Kingpin and, post-war, he'd teach his ward to shoot, drive, fight, et al. The lad would grow up to become another secret agent, this one a very '70s moustache-sporting man-about-town codenamed Fireball in the short lived *Bullet* comic.

05
NOT SO MUCH A SECRET AGENT MORE A SECRET WEAPON!
M.A.C.H.1
2000
THRILLER
SUBJECT: SECRET AGENT JOHN PROBE.
PROCESS: COMPU-PUNCTURE HYPERPOWER.
DATA: COMPU-PUNCTURE IS A COMPUTERISED FORM OF ACUPUNCTURE BY INSERTING SPECIAL ELECTRO NEEDLES INTO PROBE'S BODY. HIS ENERGY FLOW WILL INCREASE UNTIL HE HAS THE STRENGTH OF FIFTY MEN!
*MAN ACTIVATED BY COMPU-PUNCTURE HYPERPOWER

MACH 1

2000 AD, like *Action Comic* before it, gleefully raided every popular movie and TV archetype of the time, then added its own dark, violent twists, and so it was with *MACH 1* – a British take on *The Six Million Dollar Man*, with agent John Probe (yeah, right) given super-speed, strength and agility by the magic of acupuncture (MACH stands for Man Activate by Compu-Puncture Hyperpower). Arriving with *2000 AD*'s first issue, in 1977, he shared his brain with a tactical computer he talked to, much like Marvel's Deathlok of a couple of years earlier. While Steve Austin's TV adventures became increasingly light and family-friendly, *MACH 1* got ever darker, not least with the arrival of a broken, Frankenstein's monster like predecessor, the insane MACH Zero.

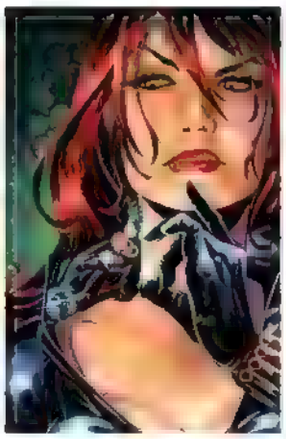
Modesty Blaise

We were unkind to 007, relegating him to #18 because "comic strips don't count". Well, welcome to our hypocrisy. Modesty Blaise charts much higher, despite being a daily newspaper strip character (also, novels, comic books and a little-loved film too). How come? Well, perhaps because 007's newspaper strips, no matter how good, are a minor add-on, whereas they're core to Modesty Blaise. Or maybe because she's been so very influential on the wider comic book world, her origin stolen for Marvel's Storm, her look and methods by half the female agents on this list. An orphan who rose to head a criminal organisation, then retired to the London highlife, she and tough East End sidekick Willie Garvin keep boredom at bay by accepting freelance missions from the British Secret Service. Supervillains, beware! Modesty's strip ran in the *London Evening Standard* and across the world from 1963 until 2001, and most have been collected in relentlessly excellent Titan Books albums.

Shang-Chi

After talking about all his buddies, we finally get to the star. The only MI6 operative to ever go into action wearing only red silk pyjamas (even TV's Jason King wouldn't have risked it), Shang Chi was the extraordinary martial arts hero of *Master Of Kung Fu*, Marvel's most consistently excellent comic of the '70s, and possibly the best spy story ever put out by a major American comic book company.

Written largely by Doug Moench, with art from a number of inventive, detail-orientated star pencillers – notably Paul Gulacy and the excellent, tragic Gene Day – it told of a small band of agents in hot pursuit of our hero's father, the evil Chinese criminal mastermind Fu Manchu. Shang Chi was an incredible fighter but a peaceful soul at heart, and it's this conflict – plus the machinations of a vast supporting cast – that drove the book. Packed with heart, intelligence, crazy page layouts and the most dramatic fights, it was a series like no other. Rights issues concerning Fu Manchu make reprints impossible, sadly.



Black Widow

Unlike many superheroes who've had spy careers pressed upon them, Natasha/Natalia Romanoff/Romanova – somewhere late in the day, Marvel learned how Russian names really work – actually started out as one. Initially a villainous Russian agent in Stan Lee's *Iron Man*, and then a superheroine who never quite shed her espionage background, she bounced between superhero antics and undercover missions for SHIELD, Secret Avengers and others. Now one of Marvel's premier heroines – thanks in no small part to Scarlet Johannson's turn in *Iron Man 2*, *The Avengers*, et al – it's to be hoped that her latest ongoing series has, at last, staying power. First seen in *Tales Of Suspense* #52 (April 1964), Natasha really came into focus after she defected to the US, and especially with the redesigned John Romita version of her costume, first seen in *Amazing Spider-Man* #86. Lightly enhanced by the Soviets in Captain America-like fashion, she's fought off her late '90s replacement – a blonde second generation Black Widow – to reign as comics' top female agent.

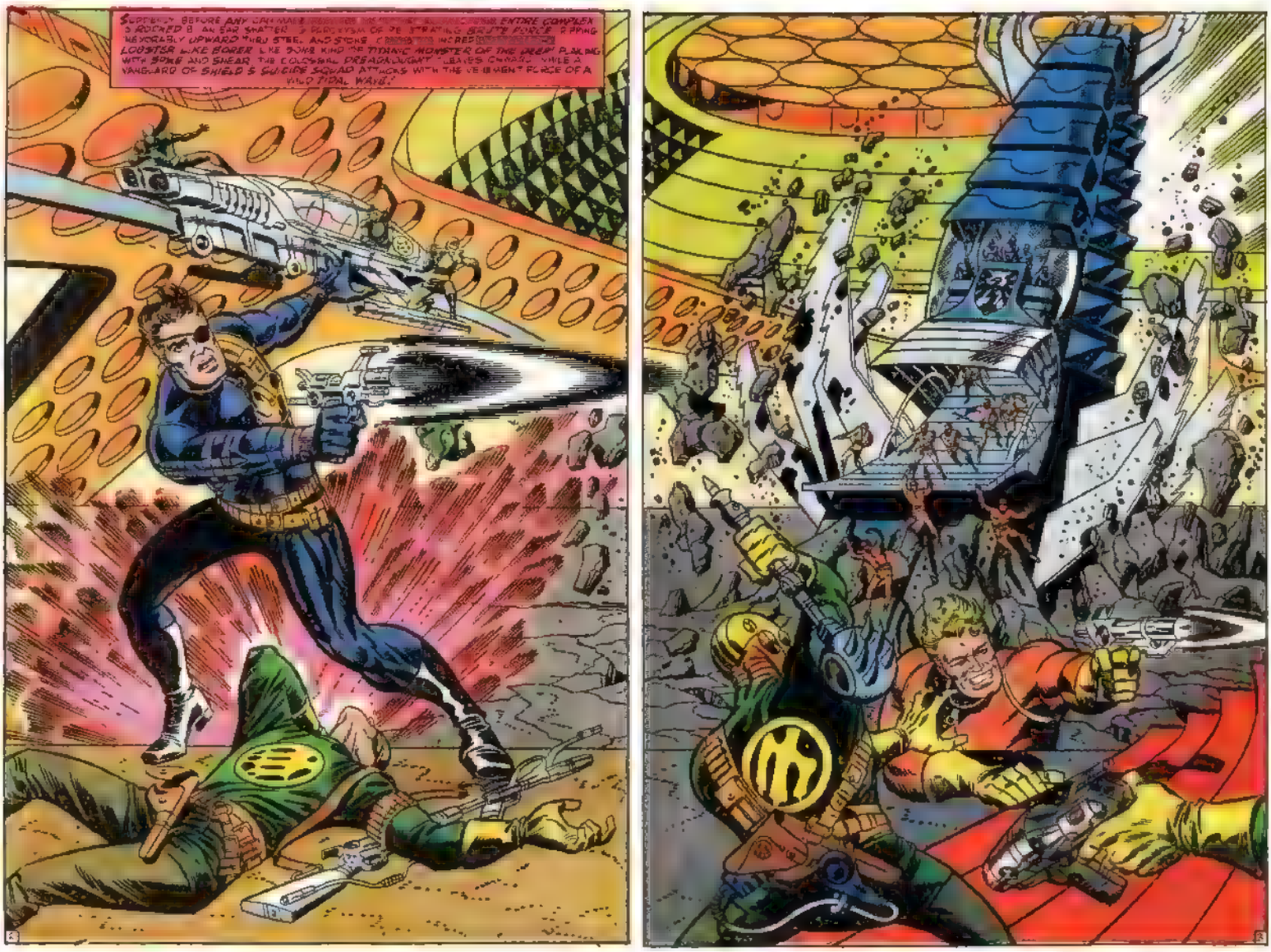
"TIME HAD RUN OUT! JUST WASN'T ANY POINT TA STALLIN' AROUND LONGER! IF I WAS GONNA MAKE A MOVE, IT HAD TO BE NOW! I ASSEMBLED A DELAYED-ACTION TIME BOMB..."

01 Nick Fury

There could only be one, and – of course – it's this guy: the blue-collar war hero turned elegant superspy, the gritty cold warrior-cum-international power broker, the only comic book character who could be played by both David Hasselhoff and Samuel L Jackson with similar conviction (though, of course, we all know a young Clint Eastwood circa *The Eiger Sanction* would be heaven's casting choice).

We've banged on enough about the joys of classic Jim Steranko Fury elsewhere in this issue, but the genius of Nick Fury is that he works in so many places and so many ways – as the gruff, unflappable spymaster in *Elektra: Assassin*; as the master manipulator in *The Ultimates*; as Queen Elizabeth's intelligence chief in *1602*, as the dashing romantic lead, as Basil Exposition.

Perhaps the most under-rated version of late has been the Marvel MAX take, a more realistic character detailed by Garth Ennis and assorted artists in *Fury MAX*, assorted *Punisher* stories, and – especially – the brilliant miniseries *Fury: My War Gone By*, one of the most underrated comics of recent years. For real-life Cold War spying – from the Bay of Pigs to Nicaragua and beyond – it's hard to beat, and as a sort-of send-off to classic Fury (for now, at least, sidelined to make space for the Marcus Johnson version) it's stunning.


SUDDENLY BEFORE ANY CAN MAKE
SHOCKED B AN EAR SHATTER PROCESSION OF TE STRATOS BRUTE FORCE RIPPING
INEXORABLY UPWARD THRU STEEL AND STONE
LOBSTER LIKE BORER LIKE SOME KIND OF TITANIC MONSTER OF THE DEEP PLOWING
WITH SPINE AND SHEAR THE COLOSSAL DREADNOUGHT LAIES CHAOTIC WHILE A
VANGUARD OF SHIELD'S SUICIDE SQUAD ATTACKS WITH THE VEHEMENT FORCE OF A
WILD TIDAL WAVE!

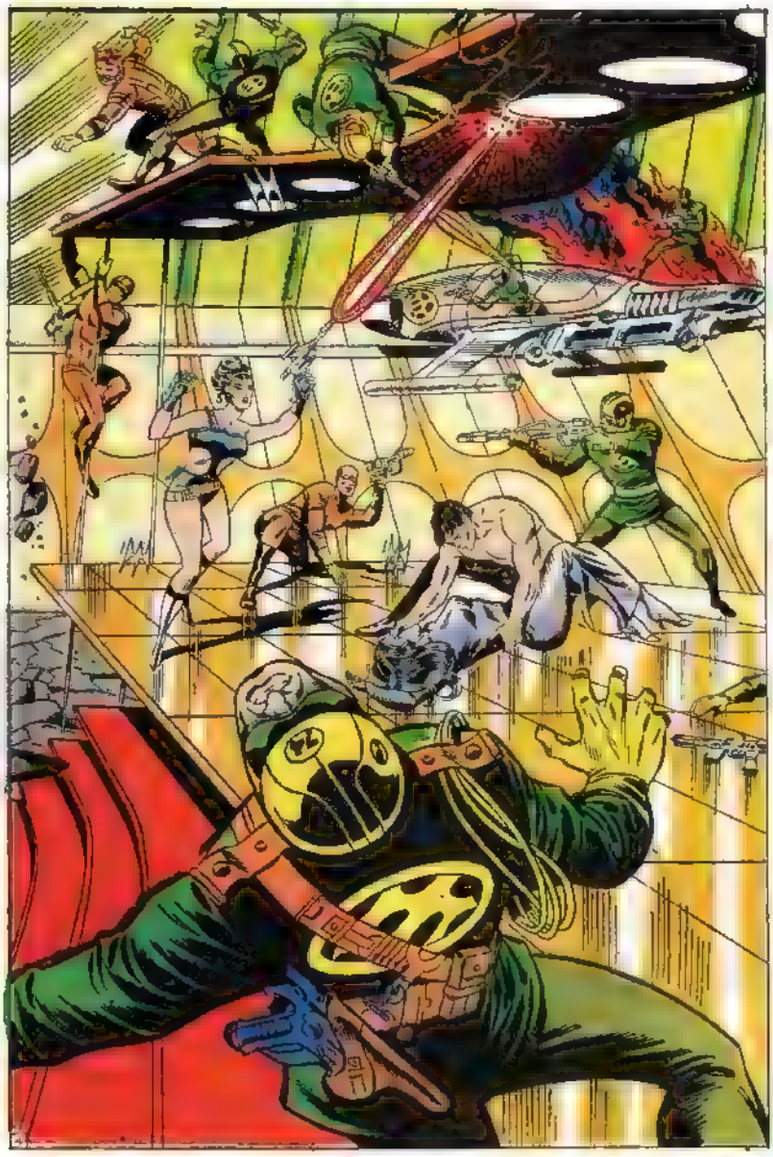
Images: Marvel

DON'T YIELD!

Marvel's enduring superspy agency SHIELD – and its grizzled "ramrod", Nick Fury – has become the single strongest thread that holds its universe together. **Matt Bielby** explains how...

In many ways, the creation of superspy outfit SHIELD has to be seen as something of a failure – after all, its only ongoing comic book, *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*, lasted but two fairly short runs (in the late '60s and the '90s) and hasn't been revived since. (This in a world where such relative nobodies as the New Warriors get multiple bites at the cherry – it's almost embarrassing.)

But wait! Look at it another way and SHIELD has been triumphant, because – over the years – it has effectively co-opted the entire Marvel Universe or (at least) its superhero community[1]. These days, and especially since Ultimate Marvel – and the movie universe they modelled upon it – set the precedent, all the big Marvel storylines have really been SHIELD's, with some Nick Fury or Maria



PERSONAL NOTE TO ALL FAITHFUL SHIELD FOLLOWERS FROM JIM STERANKO: IT WAS ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE TO PRESENT THIS MIND-BENDING SUPER-SPECTACLE IN ANYTHING LESS THAN A POWERFUL, PANORAMIC FOUR-PAGE SPREAD! TO GET THE FULL EFFECT, OF COURSE, REQUIRES A SECOND ISH PLACED SIDE BY SIDE BUT WE THINK YOU'LL FIND IT TO BE WELL WORTH THE PRICE TO HAVE THE WILDEST ACTION SCENE EVER IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS!
—DARN! HOW I HAVE TO SPEND ANOTHER TWELVE CENTS!
—STINSY STAN!

BACK SHIELD!

Hill hidden behind the scenes, manipulating the superheroes in their battles.

In the early 1960s, when modern Marvel began, we felt real tension between the enthusiastic, fiercely independent amateur heroes and the mostly faceless forces of the establishment—we backed the Hulk against General Ross and his "Hulkbusters"; Spidey against the police and the press; the X-Men against everyone—but now all that's changed. For all its qualities, the original *Nick Fury* series never got over the fact that our hero was a middle-aged public servant in a suit. Today we're asked to cheer such heroes, and post *24* and *Homeland* revel in their by-any-means-necessary methods. "The Man" has won.

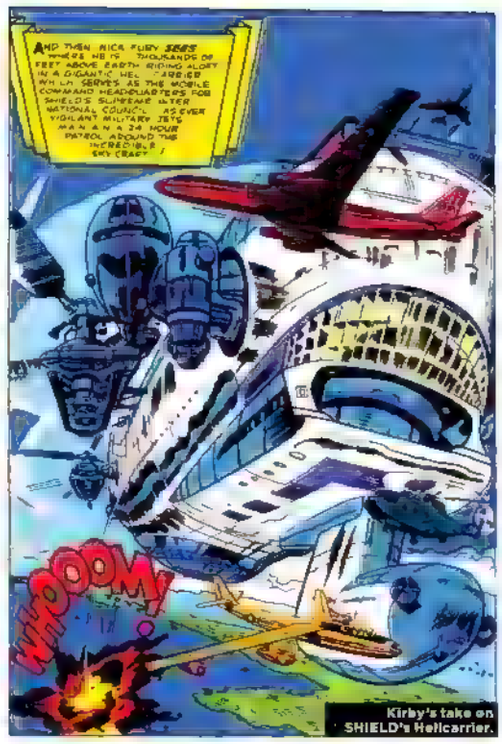
We first met Nick Fury—gruff, two-eyed, mostly unshaven—in 1963, when he starred in his »

FTOOM!
FTOOM!
K-KRAK!
THAT'S IT! YOU CLOWNS KEEP STANDIN' IN ONE SPOT, SO S OL' UNCLE NICK WON'T HAVE TO WASTE MUCH TIME L LINING YA UP IN HIS SIGHTS!
NICE PISTOL YA GOT HERE, PAL! MIND IF I JUST HELP YA GET OFF A FEW ROUNDS?

"I s a most xe was sc me supe sec et orgar sa on w h mur p e h dden agendas wh ch oh hang on

— Steranko's covers were spectacular too.

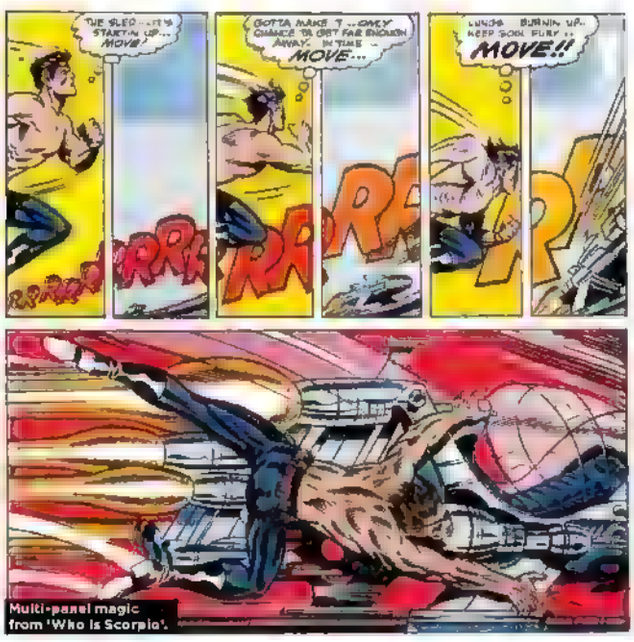
SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS
WHICH ONE OF THE HOWLING DESERTS UNDER FIRE... AND WHY?
Sgt. Fury led his motley crew on one doomed mission after another.
SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS
KEEP MOVING, YOU LUNK. EASY MORTON LIVES FOREVER SO GET THE LEAD OUT AND FOLLOW ME WE GOT US A WAR TO WIN


AND THEN NICK FURY SEES WHERE HE IS — THOUSANDS OF FEET ABOVE EARTH RIDING ALOFT IN A GIGANTIC HELICARRIER WHICH SERVES AS THE MOBILE COMMAND HEADQUARTERS FOR SHIELD'S SUPREME INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL — A SEVERE YIGILANT MILITARY FORCE MANNED 24 HOUR PATROL AROUND THE INCREDIBLE SKY CRAFT!
WHOOOM
Kirby's take on SHIELD's Hellcarrier.

ACTION... CAN'T BE HERE NOW BUT MEBBE THERE'S SOMETHIN WE CAN DO FOR HIM AFTER STREETS BE SWARMIN WITH PEOPLE SOON. GOTTA MOVE NOW!
SO I CAN ONLY WAKE MY WAY BACK TO THE PLACE THAT CAR WAS OUTTA
YEAH I'M GONNA FIND ANY ANSWERS TALKIN' ER THERE!
NEAT TRICK!
Fury's unmistakable black eye patch.

own comic, *Sgt Fury And His Howling Commandos*, in which he was depicted as a two-fisted US Army NCO, leading an unlikely gang of roughnecks on clandestine WW2 missions. He was one of Jack Kirby's more autobiographical heroes, and – though *Sgt Fury* was by no means a realistic strip – plenty of Jack's own war-time memories would crop up in the book. Surprising technical accuracy sat alongside near superhero levels of physical derring-do.

"The War Mag For People Who Hate War Mags" was a minor hit, but Nick Fury's second strip was very different. Though still muscular and rough-edged, this Fury was sleeker, more urbane – to a point – and significantly promoted. Now a Colonel, he was the proactive leader of a vast and secret spy organisation, SHIELD. Its wide-ranging mission: to counter assorted threats to the state, and to the world.


THE SLED — IT'S STARTIN UP... MOVE!
GOTTA MAKE IT... ONLY CHANCE I'LL GET FAR ENOUGH AWAY... IN TIME — MOVE...
LUCKS BURNIN UP... KEEP SOON FURY... MOVE!!
Multi-panel magic from 'Who is Scorpia'.

HYDRA LIVES!

As early as December 1963, a *Fantastic Four* tale had featured a revived Adolph Hitler as the villain, and along the way had found time for the first modern-day appearance of Nick Fury, here presented as a CIA agent. Around the same time Captain America had cropped up in an issue of the *Howling Commandos* book. Cap and Fury would keep company through the years, forever crossing over into each other's titles, the fact that both were relics of the Greatest Generation lending their tales a certain special gravitas. The modern SHIELD adventures we enjoyed in *Strange Tales* from the mid-'60s on, and the simultaneous Cap missions in *Tales Of Suspense*, almost seemed to merge at times, together telling one huge superspy story packed with sci-fi paramilitary outfits like HYDRA[2], THEM and AIM.

But as Marvel built its now-famous Universe in huge, Hulk-like leaps, Nick Fury was one of its least likely stars. Why on Earth – the cool kids who read *Spider Man* wondered – was this blunt WW2 relic being given first one, then two strips, the second launched in half book-chunks in the pages of *Strange Tales* in 1965[3]?

Called *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*[4], this was a replacement for that anthology's hopelessly weak the Human Torch and the Thing story. If Fury was 20 in 1941 – unlikely – he seemed far older – he would have to have been at least in his mid-forties by "the present day". Over the years he appeared to have learned how to (occasionally) shave, but he'd lost an eye (a genius twist, allowing him to wear street clothes yet be immediately recognisable through his rakish eye-patch). And now he was being headhunted – as two-fisted "ramrod" for a super-scientific intelligence agency highly reminiscent of TV's UNCLE, but on a bigger budget. His equally spritely existence in two time frames was eventually explained away by giving him a super serum that kept him young[5].

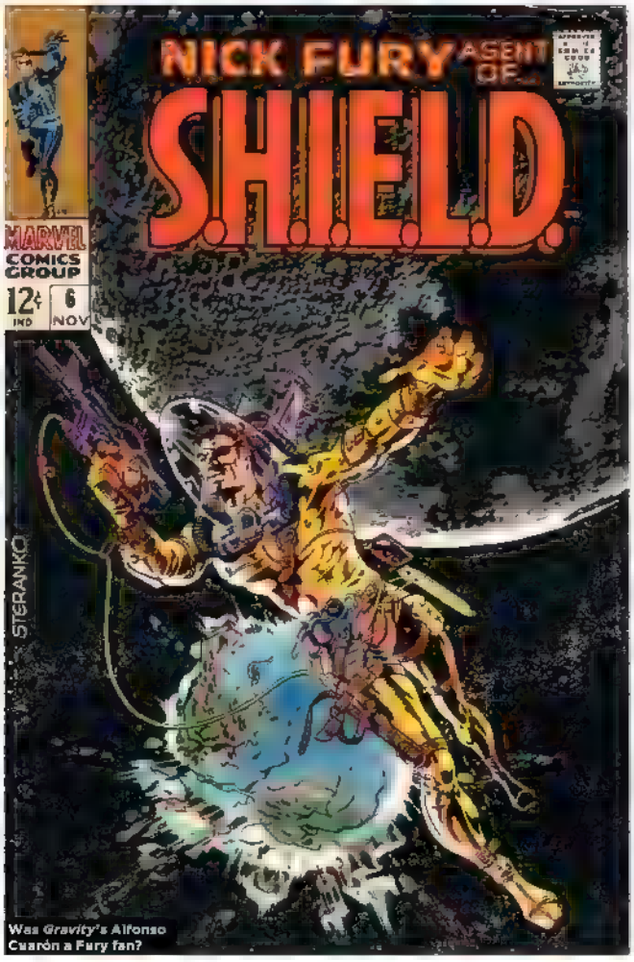
A couple of things seemed immediately unlikely here – and no, it wasn't all the flying cars, Life Model Decoys and secret bases hidden under barber's shops. One was that anyone would pick such a rough-and-ready NCO, lickety-split promote him to Colonel, and put him in charge of this hyper-expensive outfit. The other was that – for once, and amazingly, considering what was going on in strips like *Iron Man* at the time – the baddies here weren't Stan Lee's default "Commies". Instead, the main enemy was a secret cabal called HYDRA (usually capped, though it didn't seem to stand for anything), brutal masked fascists with a world domination thing going on.

Perhaps it was that Napoleon Solo on TV was battling THRUSH, not a yeast infection but a secret organisation that believed, as Solo once said, "in the two-party system – the masters and the slaves" (Just to make it clear that THRUSH were in no way Commies, he was teamed with

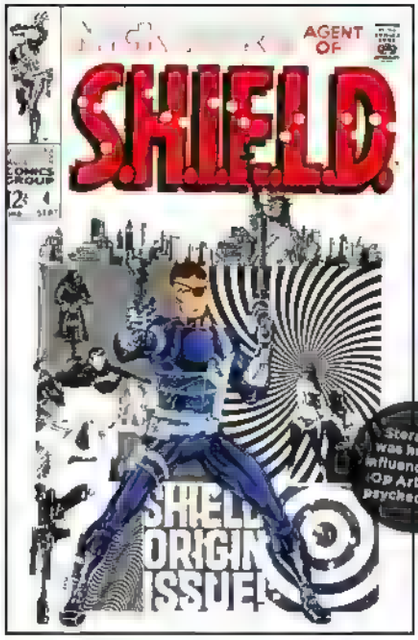
*2 HYDRA's famous motto – cut off a limb and two more shall take its place – is annoyingly good. What more fright-ening summing up of the terrors of cell-theart can you imagine?

*3 A second omnibus of even Spider-Man could not boast such a thing.

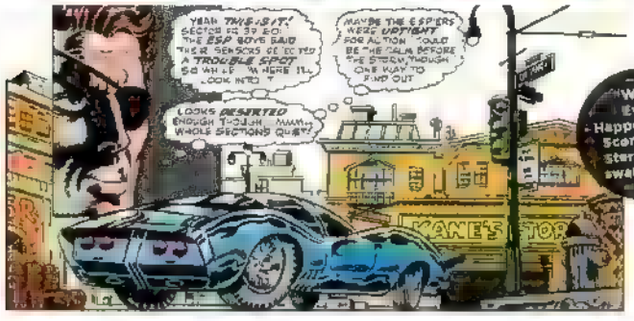
*4 Actually Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. – has to be annoying to write each time.

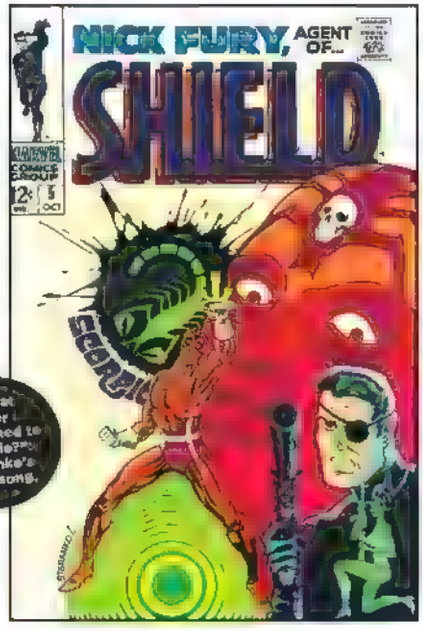


Was *Gravity's* Alfonso Cuarón a Fury fan?



Steranko was hugely influenced by Op Art and psychedelia.


YEAH, THIS IS IT! SECTOR 12 IS SO QUIET THE ESP BOYS SAID THEIR SENSORS OUGHT TO PICK UP A TROUBLE SPOT SO WHERE IS IT? LOOK INTO IT
MAYBE THE ESPERS WERE UPTIGHT FOR ACTION. COULD BE THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM, THOUGH. ONE WAY TO FIND OUT
LOOKS DESERTED ENOUGH TO ME. MAN, WHOLE SECTIONS OUT?
KANE'S



What ever Happened to Scorpio? Steranko's swan song.

Ah.... those handy vortex beam devices.

Illya Kuryakin, a Soviet UNCLE agent) Or perhaps it was that, by 1965, even 007 was fighting indie outfit SPECTRE in *Thunderball*, rather than the Russian SMERSH of earlier films. Both doubtless had their influence on SHIELD, as did the fact that the cool college kids were all swinging left by this point, pulled that way by the reality of Vietnam. Communist enemies simply no longer stacked up.

Whatever, this change of focus was certainly liberating to *SHIELD*. It meant Stan and Jack could have fun, and the new strip – Supreme Headquarters, International Espionage, Law-Enforcement Division was the original, convoluted explanation for the name – was packed with invention, strange tech, weird vehicles, secret oaths and all the rest. The very first story – though only half an issue long – was packed with this stuff, the masterstroke being a dramatic reveal that SHIELD's headquarters was a vast flying airstrip called the Helicarrier, held up by giant rotor blades and dwarfing the Jumbo Jets that constantly took off from and landed upon it.

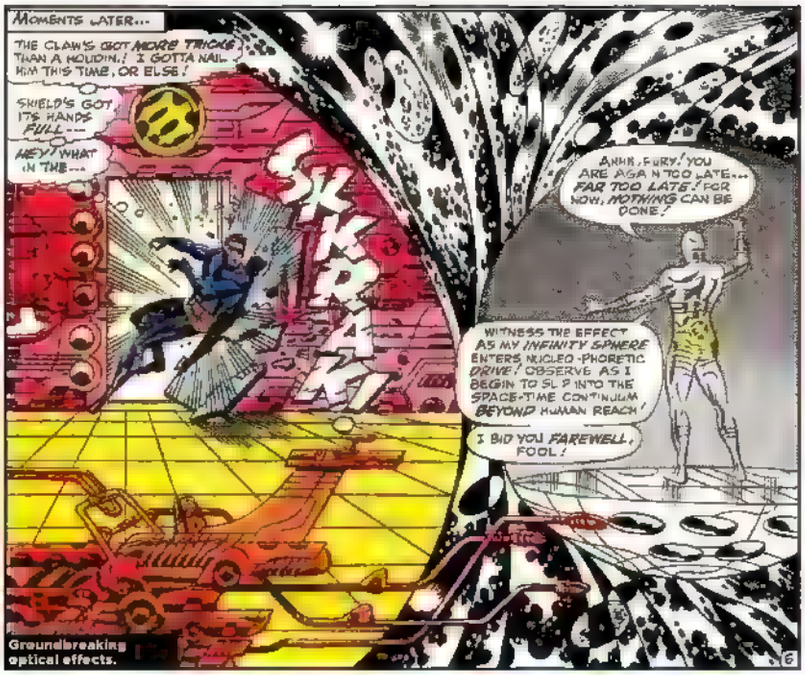
It was giddily exciting stuff, but potentially alienating, so the grumpy Fury and his supporting cast – chief amongst them being the most popular and interesting of the "Howlers", notably "Dum-Dum" Dugan and Gabe Jones – added a working class Manhattan vibe that made the whole thing feel more grounded and appealing, and provided a nice counterpoint to the snobbish Bond. It was hard to imagine Fury enjoying a Martini with 007 in some South of France casino, but easy to picture him bundling down to a corner bar for a beer with all the other working stiffs. *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* was not initially any great shakes in terms of storylines – they soon became repetitive, with HYDRA overused – but the tech made it soar. In time, even *Iron Man* would move into the high-tech superspy space now being so ably carved out by *Captain America* and *SHIELD*.

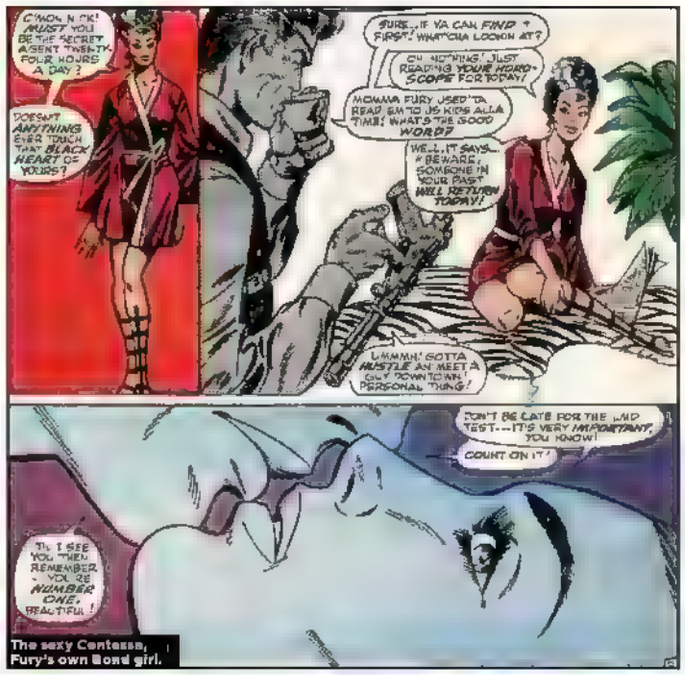
WHO IS SCORPIO?

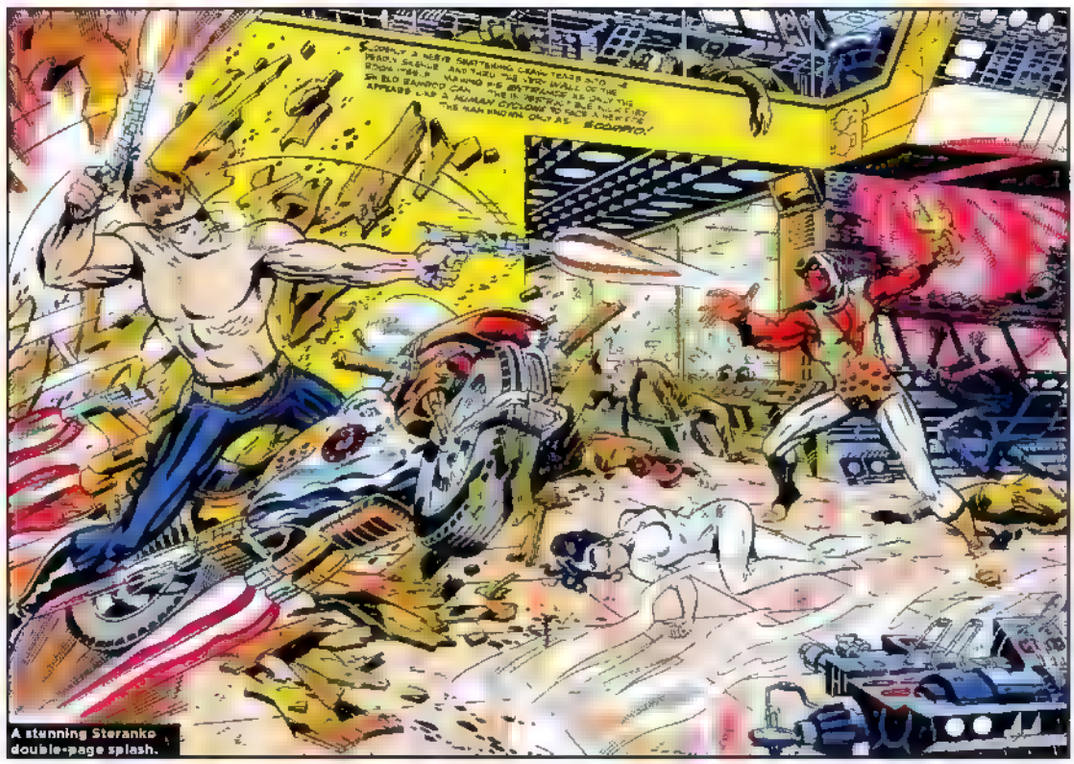
The point where *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* became great, however, was around 1966-67. Under a firecracker new talent – Jim Steranko, a glamorous, swaggering one-time magician, escape artist, car thief and musician – SHIELD was heading in a different direction. Steranko had worked as art director at a Pennsylvania advertising agency, and oozed glamour like no other comics creator: he was good-looking and confident, with an eye for a striking hairstyle and a beautiful woman. He understood pop culture like few others, and had a knack for picking up almost any skill overnight: the Pop Art glamour of the "Batmania" that had surrounded the hit *Batman* TV show thrilled him, so here he was, hopping aboard comics as the hot new thing. First up, he'd sold a hero called Spyman to Harvey, but now he was knocking on the door of the industry's Ground Zero, Marvel, and swiftly molding his style into a version of Kirby's. Stan was bowled over, knowing the work was crude but loving the raw

“ Steranko oozed glamour like no other comics creator ”

*Two problems immediately presented themselves: first, how do all the supporting cast, without the benefit of such fig-leafs, stay equally humble? And secondly, how exactly in a universe where eternals you'd have apparently possibly has Fury's secret sex-um not become the thing everyone's fighting over, the most significant invention in the history of mankind?


MOMENTS LATER...
THE CLAW'S GOT MORE TRICKS THAN A HOUDINI! I GOTTA NAIL HIM THIS TIME, OR ELSE!
SHIELD'S GOT ITS HANDS FULL--
HEY! WHAT IN THE--
SKRAKI
AHHH, FURY! YOU ARE AGAIN TOO LATE... FAR TOO LATE! FOR NOW, NOTHING CAN BE DONE!
WITNESS THE EFFECT AS MY INFINITY SPHERE ENTERS NUCLEO-PHORETIC DRIVE! OBSERVE AS I BEGIN TO SLIP INTO THE SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM BEYOND HUMAN REACH!
I BID YOU FAREWELL, FOOL!
Groundbreaking optical effects.


C'MON N'OK! MUST YOU BE THE SECRET AGENT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY?
DOESN'T ANYTHING EVER TRICH THAT BLACK HEART OF YOURS?
SURE...IF YA CAN FIND 'EM FIRST! WHAT'CHA LOOKIN AT?
OH NOTHING! JUST READING YOUR HORO-SCOPE FOR TODAY!
MOMMA FURY USED TA READ 'EM TO US KIDS ALLA TIME! WHAT'S THE GOOD WORD?
WELL, IT SAYS... "BEWARE, SOMEONE IN YOUR PAST WILL RETURN TODAY!"
LMMMH! GOTTA HUSTLE AN' MEET A GAL DOWNTOWN! PERSONAL THING!
DON'T BE LATE FOR THE 2ND TEST--IT'S VERY IMPORTANT, YOU KNOW!
COUNT ON IT!
TH, I SEE YOU, THEN REMEMBER YOU'RE NUMBER ONE, BEAUTIFUL!
The sexy Contessa, Fury's own Bond girl.


A STUNNING NEW SMASHING CRAWL TEARS INTO A READY SCENE AND THRU THE VERY WALL OF THE BOOK ITSELF, A HAND HE BATTERED CAN BE SEEN! BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE HAND ALONE! IT'S ATTACHED TO AN APPARENTLY LIVE & HUMAN CYCLONE OF FURY! THE MAN WHO WILL ONLY BE SCORPIO!
A stunning Steranko double-page splash.

energy of it, and had Steranko begin by pencilling and inking the *Fury* strip over Kirby's layouts. By *Strange Tales* #155 (April 1967), with Kirby cutting back his workload, Steranko was given the entire strip to write, draw, do whatever he wished with – nobody else, since Wally Wood on *Daredevil*, had been offered such a deal.

"Everything I could possible apply from my background, including the magic I've done, goes into every comic story," said Steranko. "Nick Fury became Steranko."

And so he did. This was a notably slimmer, more elegant Fury – more James Coburn than John Wayne – and much more a ladies' man, a young, elegant American Bond who hung out with supermodel lookalikes and enjoyed some of the most blatant implied sex anyone had dared slip past the Comics Code. Steranko threw everything at the strip – you felt he wasn't taking it especially seriously, and new concepts and gadgets were abandoned almost as soon as they'd been introduced, but it was a giddy, endlessly inventive ride nonetheless, cycling between mood pieces and messy but visually stunning explosions of stylised technological violence. This *SHIELD* was very aware of its own innate ridiculousness – but almost painfully thrilling all the same.

But though Steranko's writing was fun, excelling at end-of-issue cliffhangers, often revealed in vast two-page splashes – it was his art that got fandom talking. Initially it wasn't perfect, with some weird anatomy and painful perspectives, but it always had style – and seemed to improve from issue to issue. There was a visual punch here,

surely born of his advertising days, that few older artists could hope to compete with. A psychedelic whirlwind of flashy effects, bodies in bizarre motion and outrageous machinery, there was an inventiveness to the layouts that meant you never knew quite what you'd find when you turned each page. Steranko had followed Kirby in the use of collage, but added his own Op Art monochrome graphic effects and weird strobing too – a constant use of spirals, concentric circles and such gave it something of the hip feel of *The Avengers* TV show. Unlike most comic book artists he threw himself into the colouring too – here was a guy concerned, not just with his individual job, but with the whole package of "his" comic.

Some were baffled – how was establishment boy Nick Fury suddenly central to its trippiest, most psychedelic comic since early *Dr Strange*?[16] But the smart kids loved it, feeding off all the references to fine art – those Dali-esque melting clocks and the rest. And the ladies did too – here was a cool comic book hero they could actually fancy.

Steranko was still not yet 30, and feeding off a friendly competition with an even younger artist called Neal Adams. But working like he did took time, and time was something comics didn't have. "He couldn't care less about deadlines, he did it his way," said an exasperated Stan Lee – and soon Adams was acting in a similar fashion. Editors hated it, but what could they do? These two had fandom by the balls, and Steranko had the luxury of a high-earning day job too – comics were a hobby, the financial rewards unimportant. Plus, he had no family, no children – just a desire to experiment with the form.

In 1968 Marvel expanded yet again, and *Strange Tales* was split into two regular

[16] Not much to do with Marvel – occasional appearances by Captain America or the Hulk aside – made this one of the most unusual and weird books Steranko's *Fury* was ever shown beast – connected to the best of Marvel by the thinnest of cords.

Agents of SHIELD

SHIELD agents don't begin and end with Phil Coulson and his dysfunctional little band. Here are 17 of Nick Fury's best...

Phil Coulson

A movie-only invention for the first *Iron Man* film in 2008, middle-aged, dry-witted agent Coulson quickly became part of the thread that holds the movie MU together, then got introduced into comics in the *Battle Scars* miniseries that also brought us Nick Fury Jr. Sadly, early onscreen hints that the character might be gay seem to have been abandoned at this point.

"Dum Dum" Dugan

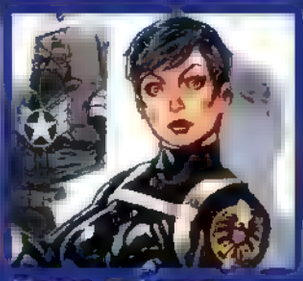
Fury's comically attired – and, as Timothy Aloysius Cadwallader Dugan, similarly named – right-hand man, he's a rugged, loyal, gruff and often presented as Fury's deputy. An ex-circus strongman, he was originally British, but was soon retconned as Boston Irish; one of his rare moments outside Fury's shadow was when he fronted SHIELD's '70s anti-Godzilla efforts.

John Garrett

Co-star of *Elektra: Assassin*, and thus maybe in (but maybe out) of continuity, this hard-drinking cyborg agent is a parody of the Ugly American figure, an amoral dabbler in Third World affairs; he is dismantled but ultimately redeemed, and helps save the world.

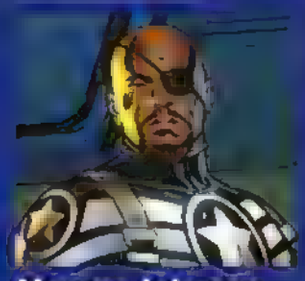
Contessa Valentina Allegra de la Fontaine

Gorgeous, highly sexual Italian agent, Nick Fury's Steranko-era love interest, and the Marvel Universe's closest thing to a Bond Girl; recent depictions have seen her as everything from a HYDRA leader to a secret Skrull.



Daisy Johnson

A Noughties invention, with dark, short-haired good looks based on a young Angelina Jolie, this young lass is the daughter of Mr Hyde, boasts earthquake powers, is unbelievably young, has run SHIELD for a time and – unfortunately – is barely distinguishable from Maria Hill in most appearances.

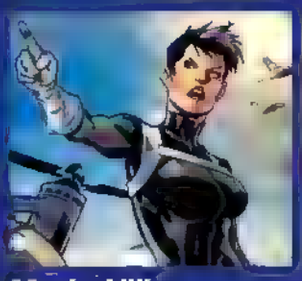


Marcus Johnson

In infuriating comic book logic, the way to make old white guy Nick Fury look like the famous Sam Jackson movie version – cool, bald, black – in the regular Marvel U was to introduce a young doppleganger of the Ultimate Marvel version, then explain him as the mixed-race son of the original, his initial "Marcus Johnson" identity quickly replaced by his birth name, Nick Fury Jr.

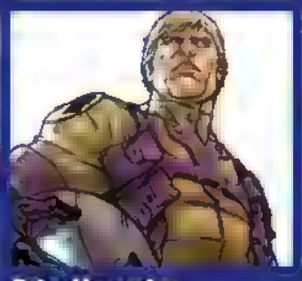
Gabe Jones

The black, horn-blowing, historically unlikely (the US Army was segregated until 1948) member of Nick Fury's WW2 Howling Commandos, who later enjoyed a long career as a somehow fit-as-a-fiddle SHIELD field agent in the '70s and '80s, and was more recently killed to show what a badass new Mark Millar/JR Jr villain Gorgon is. Boo!



Maria Hill

Cold-fish über-bitch, replacing Fury as executive director of SHIELD following *Secret War*, by-the-book and often nasty, but never corrupt, she's been one of Marvel's most successful "shades-of-grey" figures of recent years.



Eric Koenig

German ex-Howler, as unlikely as his buddy Gabe Jones; an important SHIELD agent and Captain America supporting character for a time, he was finally killed in the same HYDRA fight that did for Jones.

Clay Quartermain

Grinning, blond-haired support from the Steranko years, this Burt Lancaster-alike worked with the Hulkbusters throughout the '70s, and led the monster-based "Howling Commandos" of more recent years; finally killed by an insane Doc Samson in 2010.

Steve Rogers

As Captain America, the revived WW2 superhero undertook endless freelance missions on behalf of SHIELD during the '70s; more recently, he's run foul of the organisation more than once, and even acted as its boss after the 2010 Siege event.

Natasha Romanova

SHIELD has had all sorts of superhuman operatives over the years, from Quasar to Wolverine, but most enduring is Natalia Romanova/Nastasha Romanov (and variants of the above), the one-time Russian superspy who's become one of Marvel's key heroines.

Jasper Sitwell

SHIELD's clean-cut, eager-beaver head geek since the very earliest stories – an Archie character wandered onto a Ken Adam 007 set – he's often to be seen messing around with new, experimental pieces of superspy tech; indeed, he was SHIELD's liaison to chief supplier Stark Industries for a time.

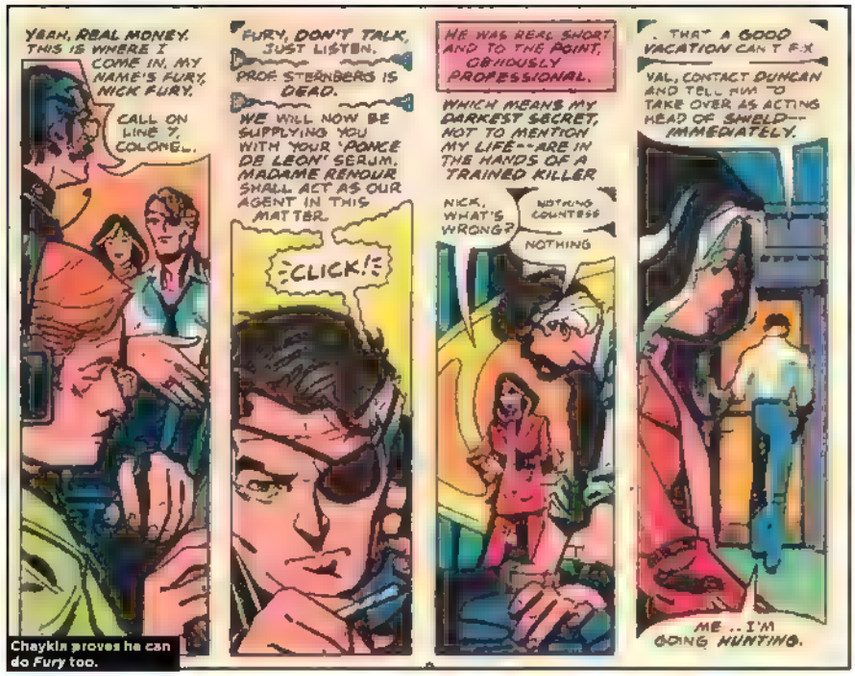
Tony Stark

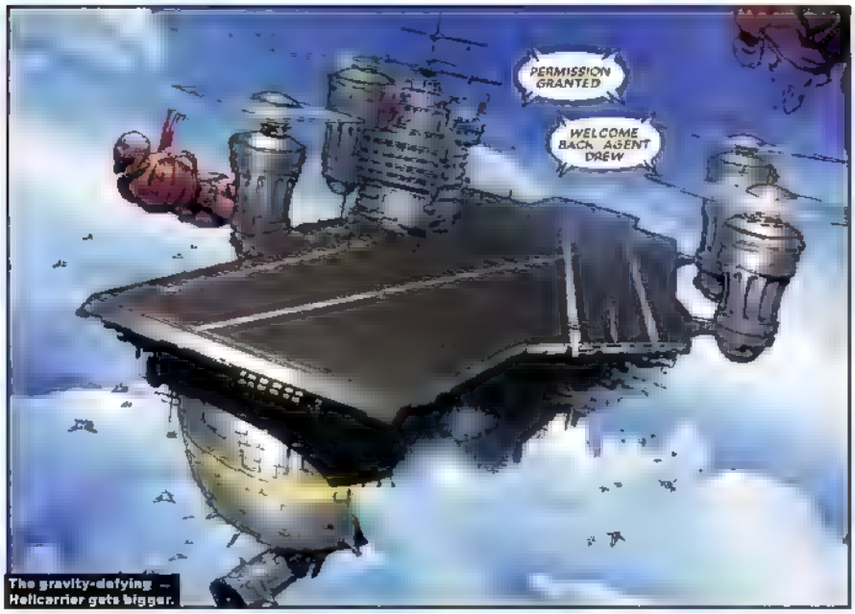
Iron Man's alter-ego was the one who appointed a stunned Nick Fury to run SHIELD in the first place (it was later retconned that Fury had been the guy who came up with the idea all along); he's always been chief tech supplier, and for a chunk of the last decade was running the whole shindig too.

Jimmy Woo

Originally created to play Nayland Smith to the Yellow Skull's Fu Manchu in a 1950's Atlas Comic, Asian-American FBI man Jimmy Woo became a SHIELD agent during the Steranko era; later he'd hunt Godzilla and head up Agents of Atlas, and he never looked less than supercool while doing it.

SHIELD's gone bad in this 1988 limited series.


YEAH, REAL MONEY. THIS IS WHERE I COME IN. MY NAME'S FURY, NICK FURY. CALL ON LINE 7, COLONEL.
"FURY, DON'T TALK, JUST LISTEN. PROF. STERNBERG'S IS DEAD. WE WILL NOW BE SUPPLYING YOU WITH YOUR 'PONCE DE LEON' SERUM. MADAME RENOUR SHALL ACT AS OUR AGENT IN THIS MATTER.
:CLICK!:
HE WAS REAL SHORT AND TO THE POINT. OBVIOUSLY PROFESSIONAL.
WHICH MEANS MY DARKEST SECRET, NOT TO MENTION MY LIFE--ARE IN THE HANDS OF A TRAINED KILLER
NICK, WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING COUNTESS
NOTHING
. THAT A GOOD VACATION CAN'T FIX
VAL, CONTACT DUNCAN AND TELL HIM TO TAKE OVER AS ACTING HEAD OF SHIELD--IMMEDIATELY.
ME .. I'M GOING HUNTING.
Chaykin proves he can do *Fury* too.



The gravity-defying ... Helicarrier gets bigger.

monthly titles - *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* and *Dr Strange*. Steranko was thrilled, using this new, 20-pages-an-issue format to take things up a notch. He started to move away from the endlessly churning adventure serial form he'd been using towards offbeat, one-off stories - two featuring an intriguing new arch-foe called Scorpio, and another set in a Scottish castle with giant Sherlock Homes-style hounds and Nazi U-boats. But, at the same time, Steranko started to move away from anything approaching deadline-hitting too.

Lee, desperate, got quicker, lesser artists to do fill in issues, and Steranko hated it. walking away - first from *SHIELD*, then from comics altogether. The *Fury* book would eventually run to a little under 20 issues, some of them reprints, then quietly die, alongside the likes of *Dr Strange*

Good morning, sir
Chief
Action list?
Today we have twenty-four active theaters listed as Condition: Yellow that will be keeping an eye on.
We have three listed as Orange and one listed as Red.
Do you want me to
Just a second

X Men and *Silver Surfer* in one of Marvel's periodic culls. Steranko had disappeared almost as quickly as he'd come. But in three short years he had suggested the future - one of cocky, independent young artists doing things their own way.

MY WAR GONE BY

Since the cancellation of their own title, SHIELD and Nick Fury have enjoyed a number of miniseries and graphic novels, as well as *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD Volume 2*, which lasted 47 issues in the early '90s - unfortunately, few have risen even to the giddy heights of mediocre. Jim Starlin and Howard Chaykin contributed a single, rather good *Marvel Spotlight* issue; Chaykin would be back for graphic novels *Wolverine/Nick Fury: The Scorpio Connection*, *Wolverine/Nick Fury: Scorpio Rising*, and as writer on the 1995 miniseries *Fury of SHIELD*, making him perhaps the third most important contributor to the character, following Kirby and Steranko. (Not everyone was impressed, when Starlin had Fury embezzle funds so he could, selfishly, get his hands on this Infinity stuff, Stan Lee was said to be "so upset by it".)

Meanwhile, the 1988 miniseries *Nick Fury vs SHIELD*, by Bob Harras and Paul Neary, appeared to mixed reactions. It begins strongly, killing off half the regular cast early on, then loses it halfway through, the ongoing *Volume 2* series that followed compounded some of the mistakes made here, and eventually a 1994 *Fury* oneshot was required to retcon much of it out of existence.

As mainstream SHIELD series floundered, strong alternative universe storylines - such as the somewhat more realistic *Ultimate SHIELD*, with its Samuel L Jackson-esque boss and the yet-more grizzled Marvel MAX *Fury*, re-invented as a Garth Ennis Cold Warrior - were putting the vigour back into Marvel's superspies. *Ultimate SHIELD* came to dominate Marvel's now-nearly defunct "more realistic" secondary universe, and much of the current movie and comic depiction of the superspy org began here - and specifically in the pages of *The Ultimates* - from a black Nick Fury to the outfit's controlling relationship vis-a-vis the Avengers. This version was an entirely American entity - the mainstream Marvel

We're still waiting for #5 and #6...

Calm down, hotshot.
We have important things to talk about, and not much time to do it in.
My name is Nick Fury.
Have you heard of me?
Bryan Hitch's Samuel L. Jackson-style Ultimates Fury.

version veers all over the place in this regard – and had the creation of everyone from Captain America to the Green Goblin to its credit, or otherwise. When multiple Helicarriers were shown hovering over SHIELD HQ, an island base called the Triskelion, like some flying Navy, readers were knocked on their backs – it was so obvious, but something the mainstream MU had never done before.

Now, as the Ultimate Universe withers and dies, much of its approach and trappings are being directly applied to the mainstream Marvel U instead, and the shady, secret ops SHIELD world has become more front and centre than ever before. Regular Hawkeye and others are redesigned to look like their *Ultimate* versions, and recent SHIELD-centric events – from the Superhuman Registration Act to SHIELD covert ops in Doctor Doom's Lavena coming to bite everyone's ass in *Secret War* – have dragged the entire shebang further into dark, Ultimate-ish territory.

Right now Marvel has at least five versions of Nick Fury: the original grizzled, heroic relic of WW2, a yet older, more grizzled Marvel MAX adults-only version, who once strangled a bad guy with his own entrails, much to Stan Lee's further horror; the Ultimate Universe version, directly based on Samuel L Jackson in *Pulp Fiction* mode, the movie universe version, based on the Ultimate one (though George Clooney, too, was apparently once considered for the role), and Nick Fury Jr, another version of the Sam Jackson model, now injected into the mainstream Marvel U as the original white guy's secret son.

It remains kind of pathetic that so few creators have managed to make comics' premier superspy outfit tick in solo stories – but it hardly matters to SHIELD. Its current ongoing TV spin-off – *Marvel's Agents Of SHIELD* – may be something of a slow starter (but 'twas ever thus with Joss Whedon series) but the outfit, now defined as Strategic Hazard Intervention Espionage Logistics Directorate in the comics and Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division on screen, has never enjoyed such a secure future. Even more so than in the comics, the Marvel Cinematic Universe uses SHIELD as its glue, and the somewhat sinister depiction of the organisation promised in the upcoming *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* movie suggests further rich possibilities.

> **“Right now Marvel has at least five versions of Fury”**

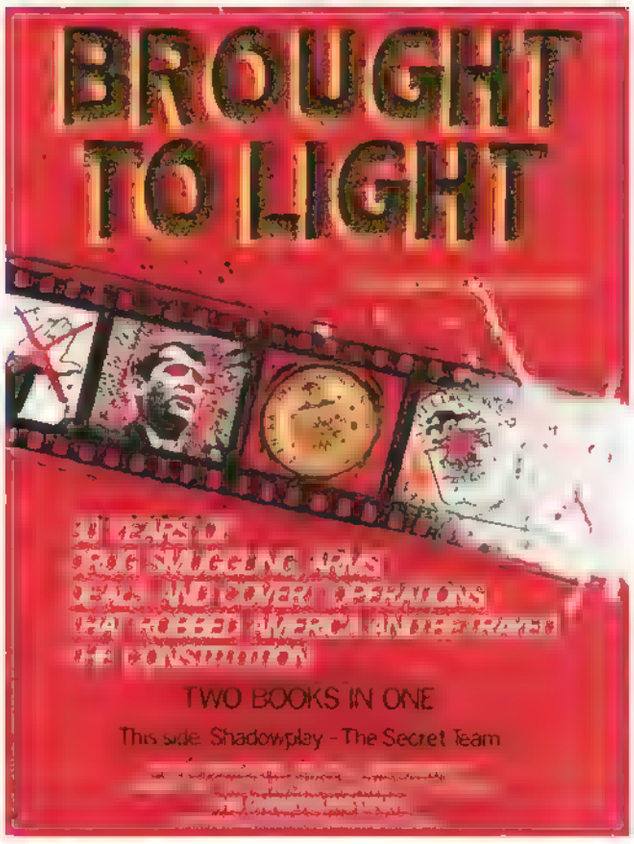
Every big Marvel storyline – events and crossovers particularly – have long since become SHIELD stories, or perhaps more properly Avengers/SHIELD stories, but now it seems like the more individualistic superheroes – the movie Cap, for one – are starting to kick against the system once again. In other words, don't always expect SHIELD to be the good guys. CH

***Marvel's Agents Of SHIELD** TV show has been picked up for an entire 22-episode season by ABC, it continues to bring such comic book series concepts as Overkill and HYDRA to the screen*

SECRET ARMY

You rarely stumble across such committed, coldly angry comics as Alan Moore's *Brought To Light*. Not often enough, thinks **Matt Bielby**

Heaving with sub-heads – "a graphic docudrama", "two books in one" and, notably, "30 years of drug smuggling, arms deals and covert operations that robbed America and betrayed the Constitution" – *Brought To Light* is that rare thing: an unashamed, aggressively political comic-as-documentary that doesn't look amateurish or over-worthy, but is instead built around a thrilling, state-of-the-art piece of work by two top creators at the peak of their powers. Never reprinted and largely forgotten now, it remains a potent back-issue box reminder of just how exciting comics seemed in the late '80s, when a new generation of creators started to take advantage of the growing independent market to tell stories the medium would earlier have fought shy of.



Brought To Light was originally to have been published by Warner Books, but when they got cold feet Eclipse Comics stepped in. It was put together on behalf of The Christic Institute, an American public interest law firm founded by the guys who'd won Karen Silkwood's famous case against the Kerr-McGee Corporation. The Christic Institute later prosecuted KKK members, represented victims at Three Mile Island, and uncovered the Iran Contra affair, but didn't survive the lawsuit at the centre of that scandal. It has since regrouped as something called The Romero Institute, with a similar mission. Always with an eye to generating public awareness, the evidence it brought against the Reagan government was also presented to the general public in the form of this unique graphic novel, detailing the shocking extent of American wrongdoing abroad.

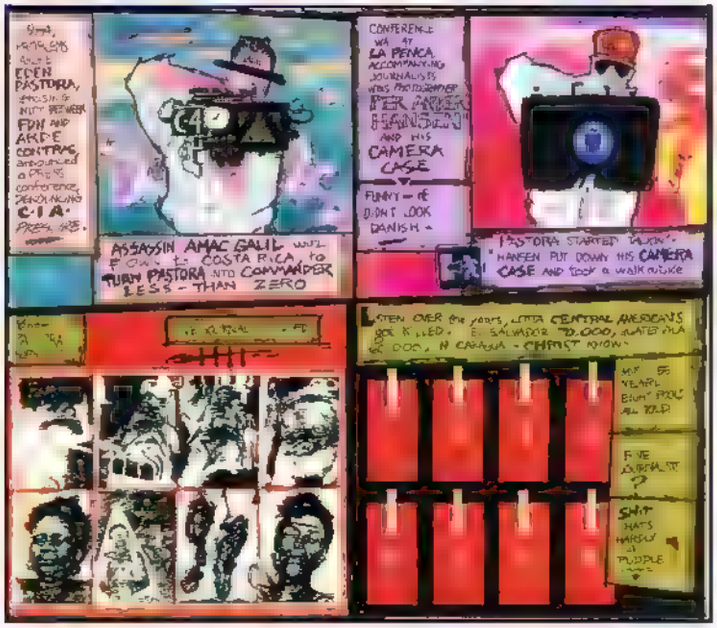
THERE WILL BE BLOOD

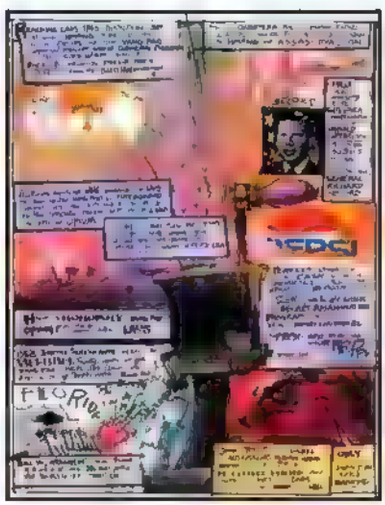
Brought To Light is a flipbook, in the '80s graphic novel format. One side is taken up by a straightforward 32-page tale called "Flashpoint: The La Penca Bombing", detailing how a press conference was bombed during the Nicaraguan civil war, the supposed target, Contra leader Edén Pastora, survived, but seven died, many of them journalists. This piece was written by Joyce Brabner and drawn by *Swamp Thing*'s Tom Yeates, based on info from those involved with the case; it firmly points blame at the CIA – although, it has to be said, evidence since makes this hardly a safe conclusion.

The other "side" of the book, however, is why we're here. "Shadowplay: The Secret Team" is a remarkable 30-page piece by Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz at the height of their abilities. Moore had just completed *Watchmen*, and was about to embark on the ill-fated *Big Numbers* with Sienkiewicz, who'd himself recently finished the great *Elektra: Assassin*.

Reminiscent of the best theatrical release documentary films – *Fahrenheit 9/11*, say, or *An Inconvenient Truth* – mashed up with the work of a particularly hallucinatory Oliver Stone, this history of the covert work of the Central Intelligence Agency, covering Vietnam, Bay Of Pigs and, yes, Iran-Contra, is told in a smokey, nightmarish bar to a stunned everyman figure by a drunk, retired "company" operative. The tale rockets along, Moore doing brilliantly to keep hitting us with striking details while keeping the narrative on track, but Most Valuable Player is surely Sienkiewicz, pulling out all the acid trip stops in much the same way he did on the *Elektra* book, but here yet angrier and more intense. There are lyrical moments, but they're few and far between, and this is an intense, chaotic experience in the main: there's scratchy cartooning, wicked caricatures and bold lettering throughout, the

THE HUGHES HAND BANK THROUGH...
1975
WHITLAM
AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOV'T, SHARKED HIS MINISTERS IN SCANDALS INVOLVING COMMERCE INTERNATIONAL, A COMPANY TIED TO BB WILSON.
LATER, SOME GUY CONFESSED TO MURDER AND WHITLAM EVIDENCE WAS DESTROYED, FUNDED BY MICHAEL HAND.
WHITLAM TELLS T.I.A. PLOTTERS SOME ASTRALIAN SPACE SLEUTH PIECE OF EVIDENCE AS A C.I.A. OPERATION!
RATTLED, SHACKLEY and THEOBALD tell AUSTRALIAN INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS later AN unprecedented CONSTITUTIONAL MANEUVER deposes WHITLAM.
SAME YEAR, A COMPANY ASSOCIATED WITH MICHAEL HAND DEALING IN DRUGS & ARMS, FUNDING OUR BRAZILIAN PALS'S 1977 BANK OPENED THEIR OWN BANK IN PANAMA TO "INVESTIGATE" OUR DRUG MONEY... MONEY LAUNDERING & U.S. ENFORCEMENT AUTHORIZATION OFFICES.
MEM
'79, CLINES MISS SEVERAL KNOCKDOWN DRAG BUSINESS, SWINDLER! MILKIE... HAND'S BOY SOY.
1980, HAND'S PARTNER FRANCIS MORAN, KILLED HIMSELF. BANK COLLAPSED amidst CIVIL litigations AND ATTEMPTS by MORAN'S CRIMES against HIS NATION TO BUY THE PHILIPPINES. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL PRESS MARCOS.
EASTMAN "WAVE."
THEN CAME SPECTACULAR MORGANS SUICIDE. MEAN after MORGAN RAN OUT OF MONEY, THE GUY HAD SO MUCH THE PRESSURE WHY U HE WANNA KILL HIMSELF? THE SAME NIGHTS. I THINK ABOUT THAT.
CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT.


EDEN PASTORA, SPOKESMAN FOR ANTI SANDINISTA FDN AND ARDE CONTRAS, announced a PRESS conference revealing C.I.A. PRESS KIT.
ASSASSIN AMAC GALIL FLOWN to COSTA RICA to TURN PASTORA INTO COMMANDER LESS - THAN ZERO
CONFERENCE HELD AT LA PENCA ACCOMPANYING JOURNALISTS WERE PHOTOGRAPHER PER ANDER HANSEN AND HIS CAMERA CASE
FUNNY - HE DIDN'T LOOK DANISH -
"PASTORA STARTED TALKIN'" "HANSEN PUT DOWN HIS CAMERA CASE AND TOOK A WALK OUTSIDE
LATER, OVER THE YEARS, LITTLE CENTRAL AMERICANS WERE KILLED - EL SALVADOR 70,000, GUATEMALA 60,000, N. CARAGUA - CHRIST KNOWS -
WHY DO PEOPLE BLAME YOU ALL TOLD?
FIVE DOLLARS?
SHIT HATS HARDLY A PUDDLE



LISSEN I AIN'T GOT ALL DAY! -ARE YOU BUYIN', OR_?
HEY!
HEY! IN A MINUTE WHERE YA GOIN'?
AW, C'MON LOOK, YOU DIDN'T EVEN FINISH YOUR DRINK! WHY DONCHA STICK AROUND?
YOU N'ME huh? WE'RE PALS AIN'T WE? SURE WE ARE
WE'RE BIRDS OF A FEATHER
EXIT
THE HANGOVER LANTERNS TREMBLE

whole thing generating a dark, blurry nauseating tone, all this glorious visual noise rammed into an approximation of Moore's favoured nine-panel grid.

It's Sienkiewicz who allows "Shadowplay" to be much more than just a paper version of Stone's *JFK* or Adam Curtis's *The Power Of Nightmares*: this is pure comics, doing things a film or documentary would find difficult, starting with the framing sequence – for this CIA man isn't some booze-addled, cold-eyed gent in a Government grey suit at all, but rather a six foot, anthropomorphic Bald Eagle, the living embodiment of the proud beast from the CIA's emblem.

"In WW2 we wuz the Office o' Strategic Services. Legitimate wartime enterprise. Glory days, right?" he begins. "By '45 we had a perfect covert warfare operation. Seemed wasteful to shut it down just cuz we weren't at war anymore. Besides, maybe we'd fought the wrong guys!"

By page five we're told of the massacre of some 20,000 people: "average body holds a gallon. Big swimming pools hold 20,000 gallons. So imagine a pool filled with blood" – and from here on the results of American intervention are measured in these pools, little graphics appearing at the bottom of relevant panels: five swimming pools dead in South Korea, 11 in Laos, eight pools across Central America and on and on.

The world has moved on since the specific politics detailed in *Brought To Light* – more wars, further horrors – and few know or care much about La Penca any more. But general awareness in the dirty tricks and moral disasters of the Cold War and beyond is surely higher than ever, and *Brought To Light* is comics' most potent contribution to this new cynicism. CH

Above: Two books in one "Flashpoint" top right, and Moore's "Shadowplay", his first major work that didn't feature superheroes

***Brought To Light** is an occasional used comic shop find, but pristine copies can be bought on Amazon, albeit at prohibitive price points*

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION?

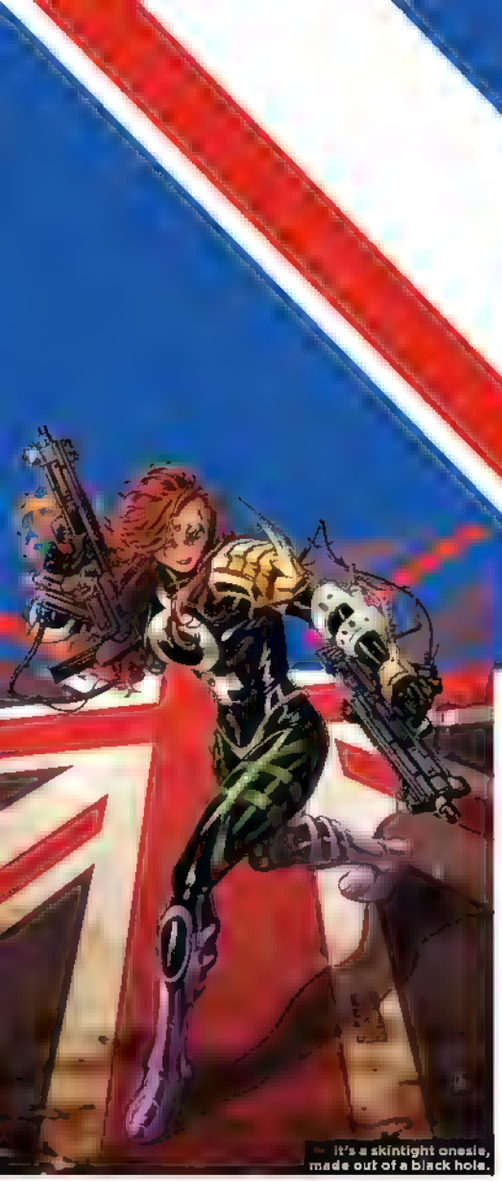
Stephen Jewell talks to Andy Lanning and Alan Cowsill about setting 2014's first crossover *Revolutionary War* on British soil

Forget *Inhumanity*. The most highly anticipated event book of the year as far as British True Believers are concerned has to be this month's *Revolutionary War*. Devised by co-writers and former Marvel UK staffers Andy Lanning and Alan Cowsill, the eight-issue series will see the return of Marvel's erstwhile British imprint's much-loved '90s stable of characters, namely Death's Head, Motormouth, Knights Of Pendragon, Warheads and Dark Angel, two decades after the ambitious but shortlived comic book line last saw the light of day.

"I was sadly aware that 20 years was scarily long and I thought that we should try and do something to mark the occasion," says Lanning, who persuaded Marvel editor Steve Wacker to green-light the project. "It's been surprising for them as quite a few people have been coming out of the woodwork saying how much they loved the Marvel UK stuff. Hopefully, with the people we've got on board, at the very least we can come up with a good rollicking story and keep fanning the flames of interest, so maybe we can do some more stuff later on off the back of it."

Bookended by the recent *Alpha* and the upcoming *Omega* issues by Lanning, Cowsill and artist Richard Elson, *Revolutionary War* comprises a number of special one-shots over the next few months. The co-authors are also scripting *Death's Head* for *Transformers* illustrator Nick Roche and *Warheads* for Gary Erskine, who actually co-created the futuristic mercenaries in 1992. Additionally, Kieron Gillen is penning *Dark Angel* for »

We've got a rich and comprehensive continuity of purely UK-based heroes



Dietrich Smith, former Marvel UK editor Glen Dakin is taking on *Motormouth* and Rob Williams is writing *Knights Of Pendragon* for Will Sliney and *Super Soldiers* for Brent Anderson

'As much as possible, we've tried to keep a flavour of the Marvel UK family so we've got a core of British and Irish writers and artists," says Lanning. "Richard Elson was involved during the early days of Marvel UK and it's fantastic that Gary is coming back to draw *Warheads* because his style really defined that series. But he only ever drew two and a half issues so Gary himself feels that it's like unfinished business. He loved the series and is chomping at the bit to get back into it. And Nick Roche grew up on this stuff, which makes me feel incredibly old.'"

With his long time partnership with Dan Abnett currently on hold, Lanning realised that he needed a new co-writer once *Revolutionary War* was given the go ahead. 'I work best when I can bounce ideas off somebody else so I was floundering around in a panic for a while, thinking, 'Blimey, I can't do all this stuff on my own because I don't know enough about the continuity involved'," he admits. 'I then thought of Alan because he was at Marvel UK for the majority of its heyday and since then he's become the go-to-guy for basically anything that's to do with British comics."

The author of numerous Marvel reference books for publisher Dorling Kindersley, Cowsill made the perfect foil. "I've got quite a good knowledge of the whole thing," he claims. "I've pretty much read everything.

> **"The idea that they're slightly kooky and off-kilter is what makes them interesting"**

COOL BRITANNIA

The Marvel UK characters' adventures which were serialised in weekly anthology title *Overkill*, as well as being published in the usual US monthly format, fused traditional American superheroic tropes with more cutting edge *2000 AD*-inspired sci-fi. "They were kind of like a strange beast to begin with," recalls Lanning. "In researching them and going back through the old stories, we've discovered that there's a lot of fondness for them. There's a lot of hokey stuff in there as well, but that's kind of fun too. The idea that they're slightly kooky and off kilter is what made these characters interesting in the first place. The best thing about them is that »

Rob Williams on writing *Knights Of Pendragon* and *Super Soldiers*

SFX: What are your memories of the Marvel UK characters?
RW: "I do have a lot of fondness for them but, being honest, I missed the Marvel UK publishing explos on in the early '90s so I never read the originals I bought the *Knights Of Pendragon* trade paperback and d d some reading up, and Andy Lanning had a load of old Marvel UK books in his loft so he dug those out But I love a lot of these characters like Pete W sdom, Union Jack and Da Thomas, who I knew from *Captain Britain* in the '80s."

SFX: Have you updated either book for the 21st century?
RW: "Not really. It was more about taking what they were 20 years ago and showing what s happened s nce. Rather than give them shiny new ze tgeist-y armour it's more interest ng to reflect through them what Britain was then and what it is today, show how times have changed by capturing that nostalgia"

SFX: So how have the Super Soldiers and the Knights of Pendragon fared in the intervening years?
RW: "Super Sold ers can't be all that super if no one's read about them in 20 years. But what's at their core is that they're soldiers, trying to fight the good f ght, and that makes them underdogs They've gone down the Andy McNab route and written the r memoirs, and a movie is being made about them Their glory days have gone and then a Mys-Tech base unleashes an army of Psycho Warriors and the Super So d ers are forced to protect innocents and try to regain the r mo,o by becoming 'super' again

"*Knights Of Pendragon* was init ally like an ahead-of-its-t me eco-thriller, so we're returning to that. There's an underground fracking operation with nefarious intent and shades of *Edge Of Darkness* When the reformed Knights explore the mine they d scover a great horror there, wh ch is how many see Britain But in the mag cal rea m of Avalon the true nature of 2013 Br tain is being born. t's got an end ng that I 100 per cent guarantee no one wil predict. And there are zomb es too!"

The Super Soldiers: armed and ready.

Revolutionary Cast List | Here are the major players...

Death's Head II

Death's Head was a robotic "free ance peacekeeping agent" who fought the Transformers before being shrunk to human proportions by the Doctor Although defeated by AIM*'s "M n on" – a personality-assimilating Super So dier – his mind overrode the cyborg's systems thanks to help from Reed R chards and Minion's creator, Dr Evelyn Necker He teamed up w th artif cial human Tuck and also had two "brothers" through the Minion programme, Death Metal and Death Wreck

Knights Of Pendragon

A modern incarnation of the Knights of the Round Table – made up of a mix of everyday fo ks and superheroes – created by the Green Man-inspired Green Knight to protect the natural order as part of his eterna war against the destruct ve Bane The Green Knight bestowed var ous powers on them and each member was also possessed by the same ancient spir t as the r Arthur an counterpart

Dark Angel

The daughter of an anc ent sorcerer and director of Mys-Tech, Shevaun Haldane was present when the Ange of Death arr ved to claim her father after he was killed by the demon Mephisto. It imp anted with n her a fragment of the universe, granting her incred ble but unpredictable and painfu powers, and giv ng her a su t of high-tech body armour so that she could fight Mys-Tech, who p anned to use a copy of Earth to enslave the original

Motor Mouth

Orphaned, foul-mouthed street urch n Harley Dav s went on the run from Mys-Tech after one of its scientists gave her dimension-hopp ng abil t es with MOPED (Mind Operated Persona Demateria ization) techno ogy, disgu sed as a pa r of trainers In the far future her pursuer, the man-child mercenary Killpower, saves her life after she is shot in the throat, the surgery giving her a "son c scream" ability and the power to travel between universes without the aid of technology

Super Soldiers

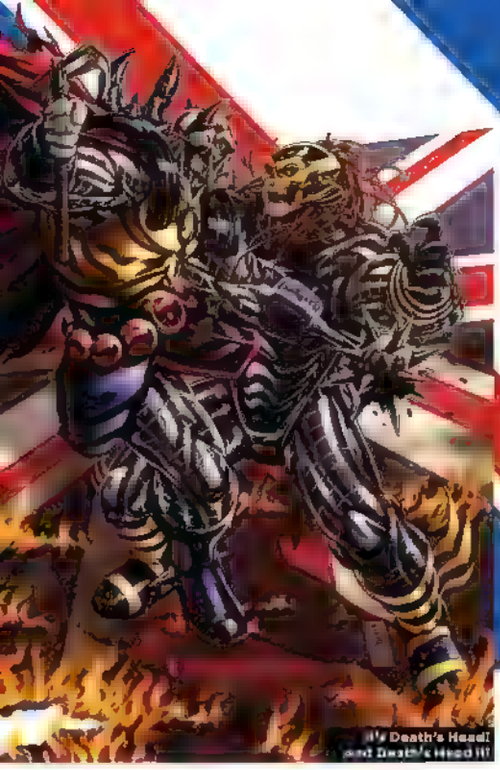
A team of superhuman sold ers created by the Br tish government but disbanded after a mission in Cambodia goes bad y wrong After Major Joseph Hauer attacked his former colleagues, his unit was privat sed and sold to the Mercy Corporat on

Warheads

Mercenaries employed by Mys-Tech to capture techno ogy or mystica artefacts from other worlds, time periods, or dimensions. Used by their superiors to attack the X-Men and make an attempt to kill the demon Mephisto, they eventually rebel

Digi-Tek

Merged with a strange substance doing the sabotage and destruction of a Mys-Tech research facility, sc entist Jonathan Bryant becomes D gi-Tek, an information-based being who can form his body into anything he wishes *Michael Molcher*



It's Death's Head! and Death's Head II!

they have that British cynical view of the world, which is a new angle that we can bring to the Marvel Universe today."

The books were first published at the height of the early '90s comics boom when other US comics companies such as Dark Horse and Vertigo also opened British offices, but the entire line was abruptly cancelled when Marvel UK was sold to Panini – a traumatic occurrence that inspired today's writers.

"The germ of the idea came to me as a sort of analogy for what actually happened to Marvel UK back then," explains Lanning. "It had this really brief spurt – three to four years – when all this stuff came out. We burnt bright, we burnt quick and then we burnt out! Following the splurge of Marvel UK stuff, Marvel US went bankrupt so we're hoping we're not a curse."

MADE IN BRITAIN

While 20 years has gone by in the real world, it's been a more nebulous period in the always flexible continuity of the Marvel Universe. "We never really got to find out what happened to Mys-Tech, Marvel UK's great villains of the time, so our premise starts with, 'What happened to those guys? Was there some great final battle that we never actually saw in the comics?' And what happened when the Americans in the form of SHIELD basically clamped down on the UK heroes?" says Lanning. "So we get to pick things up and find out what has happened to the heroes in the interim and to introduce them to today's audience."

With the likes of Pete Wisdom, Captain Britain and spy agency MI 13 also assuming prominent roles, Lanning and Cowsill are tapping into Marvel's wider tapestry of iconic British protagonists and scenarios that dates back to their own childhoods. "Alan pulled one out of the hat the other day by setting a scene at the Darkmoor Research Centre, as first seen in *Captain Britain* #1 in 1976, so we're actually referencing stuff that goes back to when we were little," laughs Lanning. "But when you go back and look at this stuff, we've actually got a rich and comprehensive continuity of purely UK-based heroes and stories to draw on.

"Back in the day, the Marvel UK characters were kept separate, but we've been able to mesh the UK and US sides of things for the first time," adds Cowsill. "Apart from the odd cameo, these characters weren't involved in the Marvel US continuity, so this is the first proper acknowledgement that all of this stuff takes place in the greater Marvel U."

The Knights: anti-fracking eco-warriors.

"Marvel UK: we burnt bright, we burnt quick and then we burnt out"

Revolutionary War *kicks off with* ***Alpha*** *#1 and* ***Dark Angel*** *#1, both out this month.*

Creating Death's Head

Michael Molcher talks to Simon Furman, co-creator of the ruthless robotic "freelance peacekeeping agent"

Comic Heroes: So what was the genesis of Death's Head?
Simon Furman: "I was writing *Transformers*, and we'd just started this space Spaghetti Western-style saga called *Wanted: Galvatron – Dead or Alive*, which spun out from *Transformers The Movie**. Part of the remit was to expand the Transformers universe, another part was to explore my love of Spaghetti Westerns, especially *The Dollars Trilogy*. Anyway, this all filtered down into the idea of a robotic bounty hunter. Originally, as the title of the comic was *Transformers* and not 'Another Bunch Of Badass Mechs', Death's Head was meant to be an entirely throwaway character. He'd serve the story, set the cat among the pigeons, and then exit stage left."

CH: Death's Head didn't just look good, he had a unique personality...
SF: "A lot of the stuff we know and love about Death's Head wasn't in the original script. But it just so happened that Geoff Senior was drawing that issue. I had the name, and I almost certainly mentioned that I wanted a skull-style cranium, but how much else I put in the script I don't know. What came back from Geoff was just so much more than I (or anyone else) was expecting. I knew immediately I didn't just want to use and discard this character, and went as far as to do another dialogue pass on the script to throw in some more character/verbal beats and tics, to really give him a personality. I was aware that bounty hunters were pretty commonplace, so I tried to think of ways to give him something a little different. There was the whole 'freelance peacekeeping agent' angle, a kind of complete denial about being anything so common as a bounty hunter, and then the idea that he never, ever does anything unless he's getting paid. Emotional responses just don't come into it."

CH: What are the key characteristics that make Death's Head such a good character and such fun to write?
SF: "The humour is a big part. I'm from that hardy British stock weaned on strips that mixed quite hard-edged action with dark, dark humour and satire. Without the gallows humour he's just another badass killing machine. You need to offset the inherent nastiness of what he does with these oddball moments and personality tics and general lack of monologuing or emoting. He's also very much a product of the '80s. Everything's about the bottom line, the payday. Show me the money.

"The *What If?* we did with Death's Head kind of sums the character up for me. In it, he pretty much sacrifices half Marvel's roster of heroes just to weaken the villain and make the 'kill' easier. Then, in the bloody aftermath, with his bounty secured, he opines wistfully about heroes and heroism and concludes … 'I hope it's not catching, yes?' That to me is Death's Head and what makes him so much fun to write."

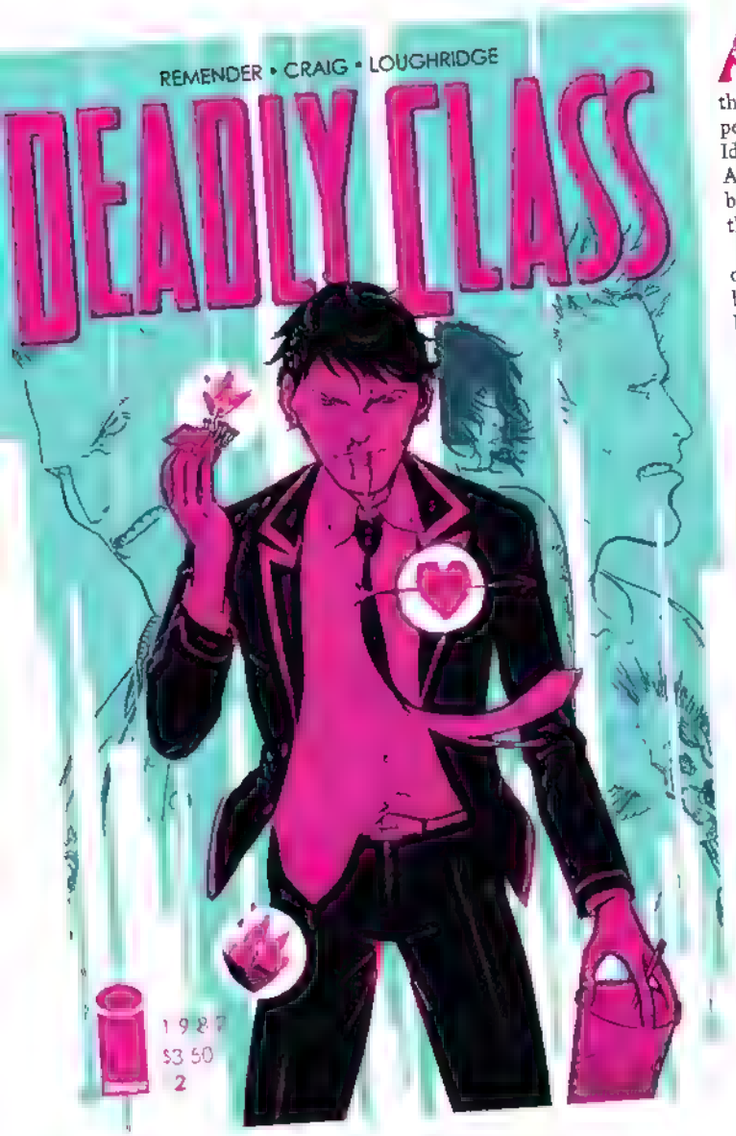
CH: The character was reborn as Death's Head II and became Marvel UK's biggest seller. Was that a bittersweet experience?
SF: "It was bitter more than sweet to be brutally honest. And the problem I had with Death's Head II was why call it Death's Head at all? It was a completely different character, and much more of a generic robot. Without the humour and the quirks/tics it just wasn't Death's Head to me. But hey, that's all water under the bridge now. Geoff and I got to do that rather cathartic *What If?* wherein the original Death's Head kills Death's Head II. Anyway, I'm over it now... really... honestly..."

CH: After 25 years, how does it feel to have a character that's still so appreciated?
SF: "It's incredible to think that Death's Head is still going and finding new fans. And he's still winning polls for HeroClix and other stuff. I just think that the core of the character is very pure and direct. He's a refreshing antidote to this kind of kill-crazy attitude you get a lot in comics now."

*We refer, of course, to the animated movie

FLYING THE BLACK FLAG

Rick Remender has brought a bit of punk rock anarchy to many a Marvel superhero, but **Stephen Jewell** discovers the fallout of his formative years are even more to the fore in his two latest projects



As a disaffected teenager growing up in small-town Arizona in the early '80s, the young Rick Remender could surely never have dreamt that he would now be simultaneously performing script duties on the House of Ideas's superheroic embodiment of the American spirit and the inaugural team-up book between Earth's Mightiest Heroes and the Merry Mutants.

But rather than *Captain America* or *Uncanny Avengers*, the 40-year-old believes that his youthful self would have been more impressed by his two new creator-owned Image titles. *Deadly Class*, with art by Wes Craig, and *Black Science*, which reunites him with his old *Secret Avengers* foil Mateo Scalera.

Remender burst onto the scene in 2005 with the phantasmagoric, pulp sci-fi series *Fear Agent*. After penning the likes of *End League* and *Gigantic* for Dark Horse, the LA resident's first Marvel break arrived in 2008 when he joined Matt Fraction as co-writer of *Punisher War Journal*. But it was really *Uncanny X-Force* that cemented Remender's reputation as one of Marvel's most visionary authors when it first appeared in 2011. Eschewing mainstream comics' preference for short, self-contained arcs, he then embarked upon an ambitious, intricately constructed 35-issue-long sci-fi epic, which spanned multiple dimensions and timelines, taking in everything from turning Warren Worthington into the dark-natured Archangel to Fantomex standing trial in the Otherworld for the murder of the Apocalypse Child.

"I don't think back then I would have believed where I've got to and it would have been thrilling to find out," he says, reflecting upon his current success. "But considering who I am, I think I'd have been more excited to know about something like *Fear Agent* and that I've got these two giant omnibus collections of the work that I did with my buddies, which we just made up out of thin air. It's more personal and it's mine. Getting a job on *Captain America* is super cool but I'm one of the thousand others who have worked on *Captain America*. With *Fear Agent*, that was 100% me, Jerome Opena and Tony Moore. If time travel existed and I could send a message back, I'm sure it'd blow the kid's mind."

Comic Heroes: You've recently returned to the creator-owned field at Image Comics after working exclusively for Marvel for several years. Is it tricky balancing your Marvel commitments with your own fare?

Rick Remender: "If you can juggle it, it's definitely fun to jump from writing a big *Captain America* epic and to then go back and sink into a pulp sci-fi story or something where I can have a little more room to play. But it's been really wonderful as I spent 10 years doing creator-owned books before coming to Marvel. Marvel has been a blast and such a fun playground. I've learned a whole lot working there with some really terrific editors and, in fact, Sebastian Girner, who is now running the shop on most of my new Image projects, is a former Marvel editor, who I worked with on *Punisher* and *Frankencastle*.

"That said, it's also an incredible pleasure to be back doing what I spent so long doing in the first place, which is developing new worlds and new characters

"It's about listening to Crass, shaking your fist and going 'All authority can kiss my ass!'"

As much as I try to insert a bit of myself into every character I write – you try to find something to identify with or something human you can connect with in even the worst villain – it's a little difficult doing that with characters that have been around for 40/50 years of continuity. You kind of have to dance through the raindrops, but with a creator-owned project it's a wide open field and you can put all of yourself into a character or a story."

CH: *Black Science*'s lead character Grant McKay is possibly the most memorable comic book anarchist since V had his Vendetta. He's a member of a subversive society, The Anarchist Order of Scientists – is that a nod to your love of pulp sci-fi?

RR: "That actually leans more into my punk rock roots. It's more about being 16 years old, listening to Crass, shaking your fist and going, 'All authority can kiss my ass.' That's taking some of the tenets of anarchy, and some of the fun concepts that I thought were really interesting as a teenager, and trying to find a more adult path for them – although that's not to say they weren't there in the first place. The Anarchist Order of Scientists are not following the rules, they're breaking the boundaries and trusting their own intellects, which is one of the major hallmarks of anarchy. Not having some authority over you, telling you how you can do something."

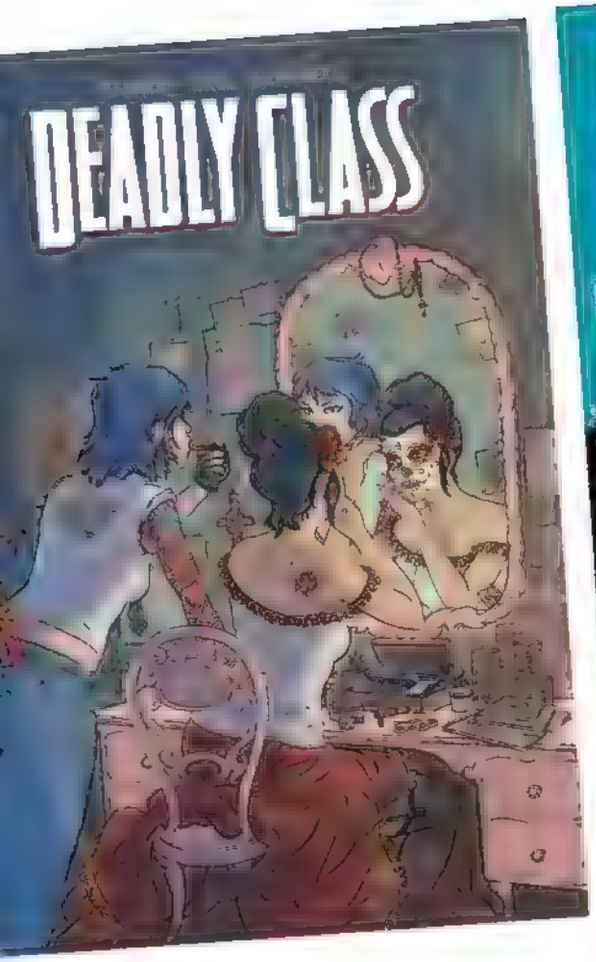
CH: Was punk rock one of your formative influences?

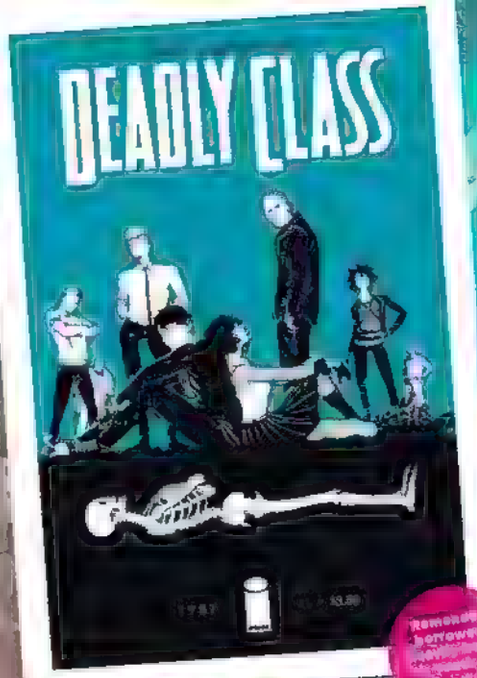
RR: "It's why I started making comic books in 1997. Me and my buddies were all animators and we spent our evenings not out dating and having fun, but working on comic books because we could do it ourselves. Punk rock really gave me that notion as I grew up listening to bands like Black Flag and Bad Brains, who'd all got together because they'd seen The Ramones and thought, 'Hey, we can do this too!'"

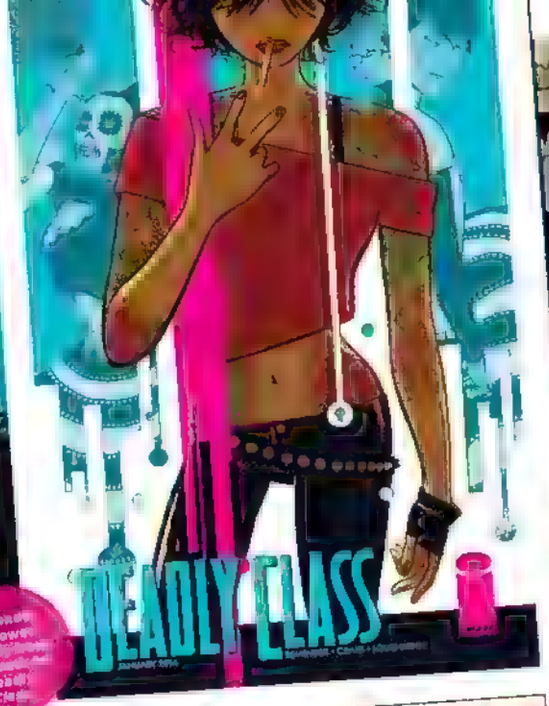
CH: January also sees the debut of *Deadly Class*, which takes place in an academy for professional killers. Is it the flip-side of *Black Science*?

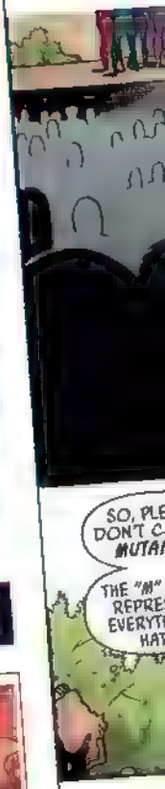
RR: "It's more grounded. It's a world without supernatural elements, which means that I'm completely focusing on humanity and what it's like to be a 15-year-old in a place where you don't fit in. It's dealing with that experience of high school in general but in this case it's a high school for assassins so the dagger in your back isn't always metaphorical.

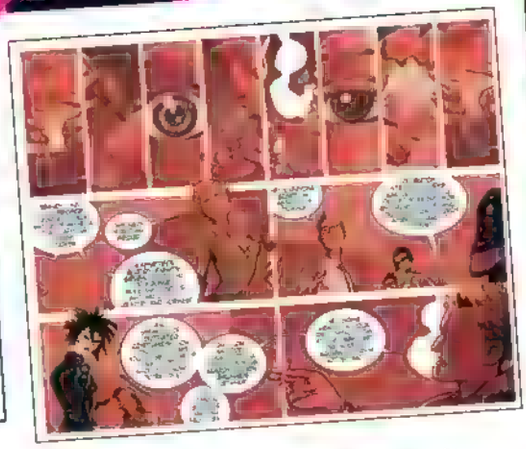
"The interesting thing about *Deadly Class* is that it's no Battle Royale, it's no bloodbath. It's really a human story and a deep investigation about what it's like to be that age and to have that passion when you were in love with that girl you had a crush on and what an earth-shattering experience it was when she liked somebody else. Then there's the added wrinkle that these kids are expected to kill people at some point. They're all prize students. For most of them, that's their legacy as their parents were maybe the lead assassins for Starlin back in the '40s and then there's the Yakuza girl and the Mexican cartel .. So you've got all these interesting »











things everybody can identify with like expectations and insecurities but with the occasional murder on top."

CH: You've said that you've drawn extensively on your own background for *Deadly Class*...

RR: "I grew up in Phoenix, which is a very violent place. As a teenager, I was witness to a murder, a friend of mine was shot and really injured, and I was beaten by gangsters. I had a really interesting experience because I didn't fit into Phoenix – me and my buddies were like the outcast punk rockers and weirdos. It was not the right place to be that kind of guy because it was populated by thick-necked jocks and all other different kinds of people who were not my people.

"I was in a small knit group of guys and we got to witness all of that from our own little bubble. That was one of the things I wanted to explore, that feeling of, 'I don't belong here in this terrible place,' but also the misadventures that I had, the drug abuse tales and the gun fights. They're things I actually lived through. I want to inject the story, not just with metaphors about my life or the occasional peppering of philosophy, but with things that actually happened to me. I'm not going to tell people which are real and which aren't because then you're kind of taken out of the story but in the first trade, at least two or three things that I lived through will be in there."

CH: Did you want to bring some of that outsider figure status to Steve Rogers's family history?

RR: "He's Captain America and that obviously ties him into America. But I also wanted to explore the fact that he comes from the part of the American Dream that is the most important, which is immigration. It's previously been mentioned that his parents were impoverished immigrants but it hadn't really been focused on. It's always struck me that if you want to make Cap represent something more than just the blonde, blue-eyed white guy who runs around fighting in World War II, there's the idea that he is the son of Irish immigrants and is also this superhuman emblem of the ideals of liberty, honour and bravery. That makes him everybody's hero on some level. It makes him not just American but an Irish immigrant American. He's just one generation here, which is something we've lost touch with on some level as none of us have been here all that long."

CH: Is *Uncanny Avengers* a natural extension of *Uncanny X-Force*?

RR: "A lot of the threads connect and boil back to *X-Force*. Once I'm done with *Uncanny Avengers*, I see both of those books as being things that you could enjoy reading together.

"When I was cooking up this stuff, it all came from the idea 'What if the world found out what Wolverine and the X-Men did?' I then realised that it was going to have to be the Red Skull because he'd seen into Wolverine's head in the first few issues and he knew he didn't need to do anything. 'You've given me a PR campaign as you've got an Avenger who also leads a kill squad that kills children and killed Warren Worthington, who in turn killed 5,000 people in a town in Montana.' These are things that the Red Skull could use in a real world situation to do what the Nazis did in Germany, which is to rally a bunch of angry people around someone that they can direct all their frustration at, which is what he's doing with the mutants.

"So once I got that foundation, I then had the idea of Kang having raised the next Apocalypse in order to manipulate the mutant evolution, although it might not go the way he's planned. That just seemed to work as a nice icing on top of the Red Skull's plan to bring about concentration camps and a whole new era of darkness in the Marvel Universe."

CH: There was a storm of controversy after Havok declared in *Uncanny Avengers* #5 that he no longer wished to be known

"I was witness to a murder, a friend of mine was shot, and I was beaten by gangsters"

IN FACT, I SEE THE VERY WORD "MUTANT" AS DIVISIVE.
OLD THINKING THAT SERVES TO FURTHER SEPARATE US FROM OUR FELLOW MAN.
WE ARE ALL HUMANS. OF ONE TRIBE.
WE ARE DEFINED BY OUR CHOICES, NOT THE MAKEUP OF OUR GENES.
WELL IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE CALLED "MUTANT," WHAT SHOULD WE CALL YOU?
HOW ABOUT ALEX?

by the "m-word". Did you want to draw parallels with gay rights or race relations?

RR: "I really enjoy that people make their own metaphors out of it but I don't enjoy that people sometimes then assume that their metaphors are also my metaphors When people extrapolate a metaphor from something, assume that what I m writing is that metaphor and then attack me, that s muddled thinking My experience growing up in the mid '80s was that my folks moved me out of Phoenix and into this town about an hour south in the middle of nowhere, which literally had a population of 9,000 I was a punk rock/skate kid and I was surrounded by people who were not privy to what I was into It was an unpleasant year and a half that I spent there so the X-Men comics became really important to me and not just the outcast nature of what they represent. I think anybody can find their own experience in why they like the X-Men, be it sexual orientation, race or you're just freakish looking and an outcast in an uncomfortable situation."

CH: *Uncanny Avengers* is the first ongoing book that officially brings together members of both superteams...

RR: "I saw it as a big responsibility and one that deserved a self-contained giant story that gets to a certain point There s a couple of points in #14, #17 and #19, which are like the big moments where we get to see what the problem is. The metaphor between the Avengers and the X-Men can be any number of things that are like real world allegories for the left and the right or any two groups of people who can't find their way to get along in a meaningful way You've got the Avengers and the X Men who are incapable of working together as they're petulant and always squabbling They have differences of ideology and methodology so there's endless, constant conflict between them Then you've got characters like Rogue and Scarlet Witch who have grown to despise one another and are not working to heal that

"It s a reflection of what we've seen so much in mainstream superhero comic books like *Civil War*, *Schism* and *Avengers Vs X Men* where the heroes are not acting heroically but fighting one another By the time I get to *Uncanny Avengers* #22 I would have finished my first story so I would have made my statement on what it means to be a hero and what happens to the world when heroes fight each other instead of working towards a common future." CH

***Black Science* is out now and *Deadly Class* debuts 22 January**

Bucky And Rogers In the 20th and 21st Century

What's coming up in the two former fighting partners' solo titles

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

A 12-issue maxiseries in which different creators play pass-the-parcel with the plot. What could possibly go wrong? **Judge James Lovegrove** presides...

PROSECUTION: "On trial here today, Your Honour, is an act of untrammelled mass folly equivalent to a riot or a looting spree. At the 1983 San Diego Comic Convention a group of DC writers got together and, spearheaded by Mark Evanier, devised the idea for an out-of-continuity maxiseries which would see 12 creative teams tell a round-robin story. There were simple rules. The writers must all end their chapters on a cliffhanger and provide the title for the next chapter, but there must be no consultation among them. Each issue must tie up loose threads and move the plot forward, but there was to be no cheating – a problem could not be resolved by declaring it a dream, a hoax or a hallucination."

DEFENCE: "It was a tried-and-tested concept which had been done in prose fiction many times already. Julius Schwartz, before he became one of DC's most influential ever editors, once organised a pair of composite tales, both called 'The Challenge From Beyond', for his fanzine. One of the stories featured 'weird' writers such as HP Lovecraft and Robert E Howard, the other SF writers such as EE 'Doc' Smith and Donald Wandrei. *DC Challenge*, which finally saw the light of day in 1985, had the novelty of being the first attempt at the format in the comics medium. Bravo to Evanier and friends, I say."

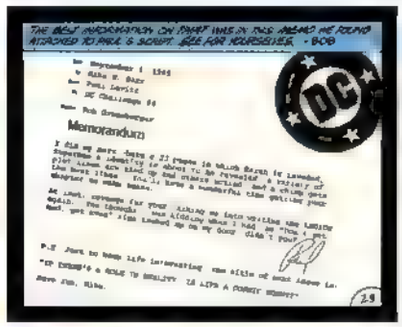
PROSECUTION: "The trouble is, the project went off the rails fairly quickly. In the first issue, scripted by Evanier, a copy boy at the *Daily Planet*, Floyd Perkins, discovers a mysterious extra floor atop the *Planet* building, where strange men are scheming around a table, one of them a pointy-eared alien. Then a panicking Floyd bumps into Humphrey Bogart, no less. Elsewhere in Metropolis, Superman battles a man possessed by a demon. Meanwhile, over in Gotham City, Batman responds to a videotaped threat by the Riddler who reveals that he knows Batman's alter ego is Bruce Wayne. Batman foils a theft at a museum. Superman's encounter with the demon prompts him to fly to the moon, where he is knocked out by an unseen foe. Wonder Woman battles a demon, too. Finally, another pointy-eared alien, this one wearing a turban, directs Batman toward a numerical clue, shortly before warning him that he has eight seconds to prevent a nuclear bomb from detonating in the middle of Gotham. Surely no writer would have set so many diverse plates spinning unless he knew someone else was going to have the responsibility for keeping them from crashing to the floor?"

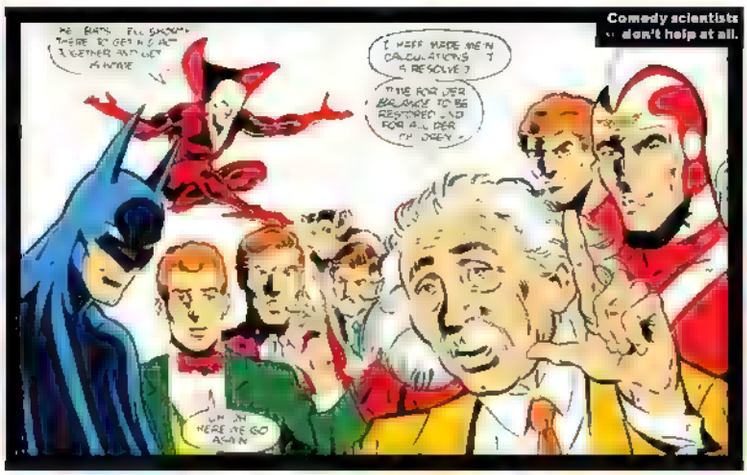
DEFENCE: "And yet what could be more fun than watching subsequent scripters trying to unravel all that and also expand upon it? I feel obliged to point out that the creators involved are a mouth-watering selection of DC's best and brightest at that time, with some revered veterans thrown in. The writers included Len Wein, Doug Moench, Paul Levitz, Mike W Barr, Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas, while the artists numbered among them the likes of Gene Colan, Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, Dave Gibbons, Joe Staton, Curt Swan, Don Heck and Keith Giffen. Mind, you must admit that that is quite a line-up."

PROSECUTION: "George Pérez was also promised as penciller of the final issue, inked by Terry Austin, but disappointingly that didn't happen. The art would have been gorgeous. Instead, #12 is a mash-up produced by a half-dozen of the series' writers with a collection of second-tier artists such as Luke McDonnell and Tom Mandrake. In between the debut issue and that, what takes place is an escalating farrago of tangled plotlines and convoluted narrative fixes.

More and more characters are introduced, including disparate and at the time largely forgotten superheroes such as B'wana Beast, the Viking Prince, the Silent Knight, and one of DC's recent Charlton acquisitions, Peter Cannon, Thunderbolt. All of them add little to the narrative

DC CHALLENGE: PHASE TWO
OKAY CHUCK--WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS THING ABOUT FIFTY TIMES NOW...
ANY QUESTIONS?
YEAH-- JUST ONE
HOW DID I GET MYSELF INTO THIS MESS?
CLEAN ENDING NOW, AS FAR AS I CAN FIGURE IT, EVANIER AND COLAN LEFT US WITH THE FOLLOWING...
We were asking the very same question...





“What takes place is an escalating farrago of tangled plotlines and convoluted narrative fixes”

progression, merely muddying the waters further by their involvement."

DEFENCE: "The basic thrust of the series is that an alien from the planet Molanto, Bork, is attempting to conquer the galaxy, opposed by another Molantan, Kaz. Bork is the first pointy-eared alien we meet in #1, Kaz the second, turbaned one. It seems that when a Molantan dies, his soul travels to a parallel universe called the Netherworld and can be resurrected in demonic form as a mindless superpowered footsoldier. It's quite a neat concept, in that it combines extraterrestrial super technology with mysticism and allows the writers free rein to dream up just about any scenario they wish. *DC Challenge*, then, is a dramatic, cosmic epic where everyone is playing for the highest stakes conceivable and just about anything is possible, up to and including a scene where the Spectre and Dr Fate struggle to maintain the fracturing physical integrity of two worlds, Earth and Rann, through sheer magical might."

PROSECUTION: "If only Evanier, as 'showrunner', and Robert Greenberger, the series editor, could have exerted the same power over their runaway project. By #8 and #9 so desperately tangled and incoherent have things become that each of those issues is a vain attempt simply to explain what has gone before in some sort of cogent manner. In #10's editorial column, Conway all but confesses that the story has disintegrated into a hopeless mess: 'This thing is a MONSTER... shambling out of control, trodding [sic] on the remains of brilliant careers like some great slime-coated mockery of a man. It seemed like a Good Idea at the time'"

DEFENCE: "Yet *DC Challenge* sold well, certainly better than anticipated, and the letter columns were full of enthusiastic missives from readers who relished trying to make sense of it all. One correspondent, a self proclaimed DC fan of 20 years, rated *Challenge* more highly than *Crisis*."

PROSECUTION: "What is most heartbreaking about the series is how exasperated the writers themselves seemed to become. Every now and then a line of dialogue appears to express their true feelings, subconsciously or otherwise, like a castaway's message in a bottle. 'Clearly, the forces of chaos are running rampant,' says Dr Fate. 'The whole thing's crazy, isn't it?' says the Joker. When, in #6, a comedy version of Albert Einstein is dragged in as a character whose aim is to restore order via his understanding of Unified Field Theory, then you know your story is in trouble."

DEFENCE "Can we not conclude that *DC Challenge* was a well-intentioned but misguided experiment, a patchwork Frankenstein monster which escaped and went on the rampage?"

PROSECUTION: "One should never forget that 'experiment' is a synonym for 'failure'."

IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
Daft vigilante action from Atlas with ***John Targitt...***
Man-Stalker *Hardboiled, violent and cartoony*

THE LITTLE COMIC BOOK COMPANY THAT COULD

Created from the ashes of Acclaim, Valiant Entertainment has been one of the success stories of the past two years. **Stephen Jewell** visited its New York offices to talk about bringing back *X-O Manowar* and *Quantum & Woody*, and launching bestselling team book *Unity*

"I'd be careful, Valiant fans are so rabid." *Comic Heroes* has just admitted to Valiant's veteran publisher Fred Pierce that we might not actually have read every single issue that the fledgling company has released since *X-O Manowar* #1 landed in May 2012. But if the return of much-loved characters such as Harbinger, Bloodshot and Archer & Armstrong had initially taken some elements of the industry by surprise, there's no escaping them now.

Along with recruiting top talents such as Peter Milligan to helm series like *Shadowman*, Valiant's first team book *Unity* became 2013's undisputed breakout hit, November's #1 selling a reported 68,500 copies, a record for a non-premiere publisher. It's no wonder, then, that Pierce sounds so upbeat and optimistic when we meet him, CEO Dinesh Shamdasani, executive editor Warren Simons and marketing director Hunter Gorinson at Valiant's Hell's Kitchen offices. Located just a couple of blocks from the Javits Center – home of the mighty New York Comic Con – it's hard not to be awestruck by the vintage Barry Windsor-Smith *Eternal Warrior* artwork that adorns the wall behind me or the assorted paraphernalia (such as the bottle of Armstrong Ale that really does look too good to open!) that surrounds us.

"The idea is to keep Valiant at the level it's now at," says Pierce. "We've done everything we can to grow slow and steady. We started out by launching a book a month for four months, which no one had ever done before. It really gave everybody in the market a chance to absorb what we were doing – and it gave us the ability to focus on one title at a time during that early period."

Valiant was originally established by former Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter and ex-Allman Brothers manager Steven Massarsky in 1989 and it blazed a bright trail in the '90s, thanks in part to the contributions of leading Marvel creators including Shooter himself, Barry Windsor-Smith and Bob Layton.

It initially focused on re-introducing Western Publishing's erstwhile Gold Key stable of characters – such as Magnus, Robot Fighter, Turok, Son Of Stone and Doctor Solar – but in 1992 it launched its own distinctive universe with the debut of Harbinger, X-O Manowar, Rai and Shadowman; Eternal Warrior and Archer & Armstrong followed hot on their heels.

Pierce himself was vice president of manufacturing and operations from 1990 to 1994, but departed for Wizard Entertainment – where he was president and CEO for 14 years – after parent company Voyager Communications was purchased by Acclaim Entertainment.

Despite building a dedicated readership, Valiant appeared doomed after Acclaim went bankrupt in 2004. A year later, though, Shamdasani and fellow entrepreneur and current Valiant vice chairman, Jason »

PETER MILLIGAN ON SHADOWMAN

Comic Heroes: How does working for Valiant compare to Marvel and DC?

Peter Milligan: "What I've found different is their attitude towards stories and superheroes. Valiant actively seems to veer away from anything too superhero-esque, which is great. There's also the matter of continuity. There's less of it with Valiant's characters so it's less of an issue."

CH: You took over *Shadowman* with #13. What is the appeal of the character?

PM: "I'm intrigued by the idea that there's a lot more to Jack Boniface than meets the eye. I don't quite believe that what we're seeing is the entire truth so I want to explore the dark shadowy sides of this young man."

CH: Valiant's titles are all very different from each other. What sets *Shadowman* apart?

PM: "What's different about my *Shadowman*, at least, is that it will plough some very dark psychological ground and it'll also have a bit of post-punk fizz and mindf**k shenanigan-ism. Maybe all this will place it somewhere between a Vertigo book and a mainstream title, which makes it different from Valiant's other books."

CH: What else can we expect from your run?

PM: "We discover some dark secrets about Jack Boniface. And the Abetters show themselves to be different from how we and Jack imagined them. This sets him on a quest, which leads to a strange backwoods mambo, a mambo unlike any in Louisiana or elsewhere."

Images © Valiant Entertainment.

Tom Fowler's cover for *Quantum & Woody* #3.

“There’s the Marvel religion, there’s the DC religion, but there’s also the Valiant religion”

Kothari, purchased its assets. Determined to breathe new life into the beleaguered line, the pair wasted no time in persuading Pierce to come back home.

“Whenever I used to do a convention, no one would ever ask me about my time at Wizard, they would only ask about my time at Valiant,” recalls Pierce. “That’s how excited our fans are. I discuss the comic book industry like it’s a religion. There’s the Marvel religion and there’s the DC religion, but there’s also the Valiant religion. We’re one of the few other companies that has got that kind of fanatical support and the beauty of it is that a lot of today’s comic book retailers were Valiant fans back in the day, which is a good part of what we owe our success to today.”

Indeed what makes Valiant’s performance even more impressive is that it s had to do it without the old Gold Key stalwarts. “One of the original discussions we had is that we thought the Valiant Universe stood much better with just the Valiant characters,” reasons Pierce. “If the Gold Key characters were available at the time, maybe we d have looked at them but I honestly love the Valiant characters more. They were very much like 20 years ahead of their time when they first came out and now I believe we’re a good part of the way there.”

The Gold Key license has recently been acquired by Dynamite Entertainment, which has, ironically, hired Valiant scribes Greg Pak (*Eternal Warrior*) and Fred Van Lente (*Archer & Armstrong*) to tackle Turok and Magnus respectively. “That was obviously one of the first things we talked about when we got here,” adds Simons. “We all love Solar and Doctor Spektor and think that they’re great, fun characters but we definitely don’t need them. Having them is not a contingent for the universe to work. We’ve got a super-deep bench up here with X-O Manowar, Bloodshot, Harbinger and Shadowman. And then there are the guys that we haven’t even been able to get to yet, such as Doctor Mirage. Plus we’re doing stuff like our team book *Unity*, which wasn’t even in the original incarnation.

‘It s really testament to the extraordinary creators that we had in the ’90s as they helped build all of this stuff. One of the early advantages that I had was that we weren t creating an all-new universe from scratch. We had an incredible template to work with, that we could update and modernise, and we also have some amazing fans, who were waiting for this stuff to come back.”

KEY CHARACTERS

Simons was an editor at Marvel from 2002 to 2007, responsible for numerous titles including Matt Fraction’s *Invincible Iron Man* and J Michael Straczynski’s run on *Thor*. “I’ve always had an affinity for working on a whole range of different characters,” he says. “I launched *Ares* with Michael Avon Oeming and Travel Foreman, and I did *Immortal Iron Fist* with Ed Brubaker, Matt Fraction and David Aja. What we were doing in both those cases was taking the key elements that we loved about those particular characters and updating them. That was something that we also wanted to do when I came here – to take a look at these amazing characters, like Bloodshot and X-O Manowar, and understand why people fell in love with them in the first place.”

With such a rich plethora of characters to choose from, selecting the right properties »

GREG PAK ON ETERNAL WARRIOR

Comic Heroes: What’s the best thing about writing *Eternal Warrior*?

Greg Pak: “It’s just a really great fit. When you’re talking about *Eternal Warrior*, you’re talking about an immortal and the chance to develop a whole new mythology and a hero adventure. There are also questions about violence, war and the value of the missions soldiers are sent on. It works on so many different levels including family, which is what the story that we came up with is about.”

CH: *Eternal Warrior* is like the *Highlander* of the Valiant-verse. Do you enjoy exploring his exploits across the centuries?

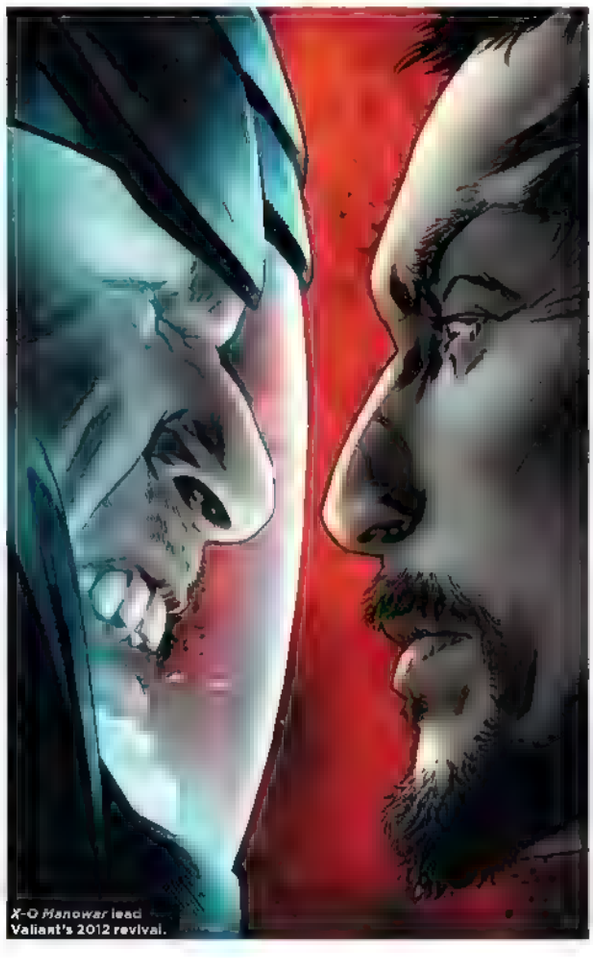
GP: “It’s a lot of fun as the book lets us jump around in time as the guy’s been around for thousands of years, which means that I can draw from any time period in history and we can also have little scenes from other parts of his life that illuminate the present story. And we’re going to go even crazier with #5, which jumps forward in time...”

CH: Speaking of which, what can you say about 4001 AD?

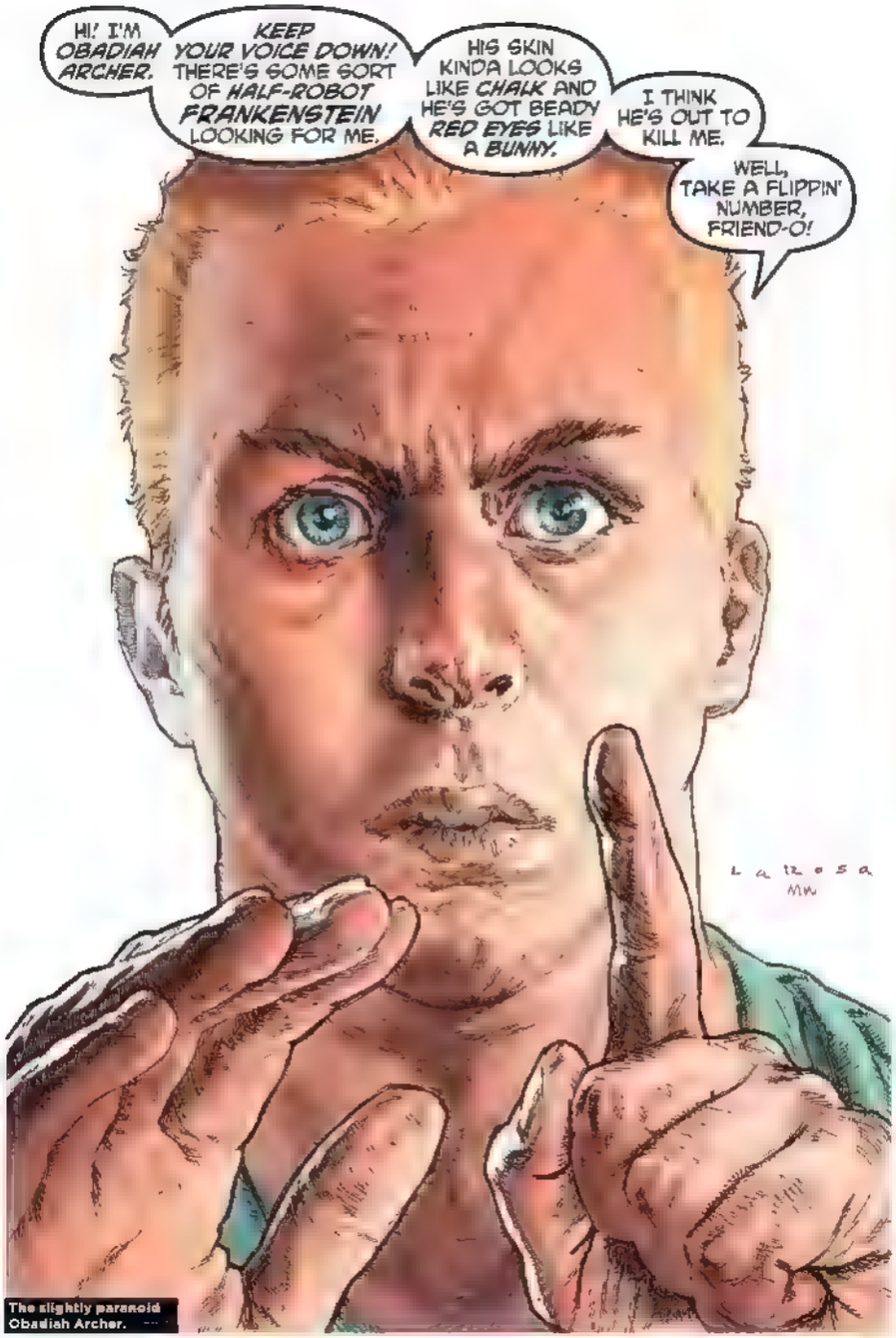
GP: ‘I can’t reveal too much about the storyline but it’s called ‘Eternal Emperor’. It’s going to be crazy because if you’re going to jump 2,000 years in the future, it’s going to be a completely different world to what we have now.”

CH: Are you looking forward to reinventing old characters such as Rai?

GP: ‘It’s a new story so we’re not going to tell any stories that have been told before. We’re going to introduce some new characters and we may use some of those classic characters as well. Nothing is off limits: there’ll be stuff that anybody coming to these books fresh will be able to enjoy, but there’ll also be some extra special pleasures for anyone who has been reading Valiant for a long time.”



X-O Manowar lead Valiant’s 2012 revival.


HI! I'M OBADIAH ARCHER.
KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN! THERE'S SOME SORT OF HALF-ROBOT FRANKENSTEIN LOOKING FOR ME.
HIS SKIN KINDA LOOKS LIKE CHALK AND HE'S GOT BEADY RED EYES LIKE A BUNNY.
I THINK HE'S OUT TO KILL ME.
WELL, TAKE A FLIPPIN' NUMBER, FRIEND-O!
LaRosa MW
The slightly paranoid Obadiah Archer.

to head up the line was a crucial decision. "X-O is one of our most beloved characters, as is Harbinger, so they were the two that we really wanted to do the most," explains Simons.

"We wanted to offer something for everyone, so *X-O* served as a big sci-fi epic, *Harbinger* is a teen drama to a certain extent, *Bloodshot* is an action movie and *Archer & Armstrong* is a comedy. We didn't want to replicate archetypes when we first came back, so we didn't want to publish *X-O* and *Eternal Warrior* back to back. We just wanted to be patient – and Fred was very wise in not rolling out nine titles at once and flooding the marketplace."

"It let us brand this stuff as well," continues Shamdasani. "So we could just go, 'Here's one title and let's make it the best that we can.' We did that for four months in a row and people were saying, 'This is an interesting new universe, they're doing quality work.' The fun that we were having in the office came through in the books and in the way we'd tease things and involve the fans. It became more than just buying and reading comics, it became part of a new growing chapter in the Valiant history."

With Marvel feeding off the phenomenal success of its cinematic endeavours and DC initiatives such as the 3D covers for last September's Villains Month also paying lucrative if short-term dividends, the comic book marketplace is seemingly becoming increasingly crowded, meaning that smaller operations such as Valiant have to constantly maximise their efforts just to stay in the game. Pierce maintains that the competition is healthy, though. "The expectations of the fans has become higher but they're also spending more money," he says. "People forget that if the product is better, people will invest more time and energy into it because our competition is not Marvel, DC, Image and Dark Horse, it's television, videogames and all the other things that take up your time."

NEW ORDER

In fact, the unexpectedly high returns of 2012's "Summer Of Valiant" launch is partly down to the enormous sales figures of the New 52 seven months earlier. "The retailers did so well out of it that they felt a little bit flush with cash so they invested a little bit more in us," says Pierce, who smartly positioned Valiant as the next big, exciting thing. "We'd still have done well but we wouldn't have done so well. The retailers could afford to take a chance and then when they made money »

FRED VAN LENTE ON ARCHER & ARMSTRONG

Comic Heroes: How does working for Valiant compare to working for Marvel?

Fred Van Lente: "It's a much smaller company so it's leaner and meaner. It's a tight-knit group so we all collaborate closely on the universe. We have summits like Marvel and DC – but obviously not with so many writers."

CH: Were you a fan of *Archer & Armstrong* when you were younger?

FVL: "I literally had to Google who they were as I'd never heard of them before. But I think Valiant approached me because of my Marvel book *Incredible Hercules*, which was another mismatch buddy adventure with an immortal strongman and sidekick."

CH: Archer and Armstrong are like the proverbial odd couple but with superpowers...

FVL: "Opposites attract and it's always good to put two dissonant notes or flavours together to see how they mix with each other."

CH: Each arc centres around a different kind of conspiracy...

FVL: "The first volume, 'The Michelangelo Code', was primarily religious conspiracy, the second was historical conspiracy and the third was mysterious disappearances. We're currently coming to the end of a storyline called 'Sect Civil War', where all the sections of the sect are battling with each other. The idea behind it was, 'What if these shadowy groups took their hands off the tiller? Would society start to crash?' Archer and Armstrong ironically have to bring the sect back together to save the world."

Valiant's X-Men-alikes, the Harbingers.

"The characters were 20 years ahead of their time"

First family crossover *Harbinger Wars*.

Upcoming #0, *Harbinger: Bleeding Hands*

with us, they could afford to take a chance with other people."

While *Unity* is currently tearing up the comic shop shelves, Pierce is already looking to the future. "We have 30 properties and almost 200 characters," he says. "Basically we go through the characters to see what fits and the creatives and editorial pick out what strikes a chord with them. If we continue to launch things slow and steady, we have enough old characters to bring back for the next few years – and we'll also create new characters. *Unity* was a new idea, as there's never really been a team book like this in the Valiant Universe, so things like that will continue to happen."

Indeed this month sees the re-emergence of the 4001 AD future-verse in *Eternal Warrior* #5, which will apparently herald the much-anticipated revival of Rai and the Future Force. "Unlike something like Marvel's 2099 books or *Legion Of Superheroes*, the ramifications are much clearer, so events that happen in the core Valiant line will immediately be seen in the 4001 timeline and vice versa, which is a very Jim Shooter idea that he'd pioneered at Valiant," reveals Gorinson, who insists that the far-flung scenario doesn't rely on its erstwhile Gold Key inhabitants such as Doctor Solar. "It doesn't need those characters as it's just a great opportunity to modernise the universe and reimagine it in a more creative way."

Valiant *will* unashamedly hark back to its past later this year, though, with the announcement that *Quantum & Woody* creators Christopher Priest and Mark Bright are returning to their beloved cult creations for a special five-issue miniseries. "It's set in the original's continuity but 20 years on," says Gorinson. "That's big on so many levels for us. Christopher Priest is one of the legendary comics creators of the past 20 years, but he's been out of the industry for six/seven years."

"You don't often see it," continues Shamdasani. "Creators who have left the fold but have come back to work on their characters again, and are doing a great job. The *Quantum & Woody* fans are freakin' insane! They've been on our backs since day one, screaming, 'Bring back *Quantum & Woody*... and the goat!'"

"We're big fans of the goat!" laughs Simons. "It's great to have the guys back. We're super-excited to have them working on the book. It's pure Priest and Bright. It's like they've never stopped working on it." CH

Alongside the ongoing series, an all new wave of Valiant zero issues are out in February and March, including ***Archer & Armstrong: Archer #0, Quantum & Woody: The Goat #0****, and more!*

Matt Kindt on Unity

Comic Heroes: How does working for Valiant compare to Marvel and DC?

Matt Kindt: "With a lot of publishers, their characters have been around forever so it's more like putting a spin on them. But with Valiant, it feels like we're getting to build these characters from the ground up. I read the Valiant books in the '90s and was a huge fan of those characters back then. I don't have the time to read many comics now but I was reading *Bloodshot* as a fan and then they called me up and asked, 'Do you want to write *Bloodshot* #0 and tell his origin?'"

CH: With *Unity*, how does it feel to write Valiant's first team book?

MK: "It's great because I get to pull out all the best characters and put them together. There's also a lot of stuff that hasn't been established in the Valiant Universe such as where Ninjak lives, so I get to figure that out."

CH: What's the significance of the title?

MK: "It's a play on the old *Unity* crossover from the '90s but the team is never actually called Unity in the story. It's actually ironic because the team is full of malcontents and disgruntled heroes. It's such a clash of personalities that Unity almost needs to have quote marks put around it!"

CH: Do you have any favourite characters?

MK: "Ninjak is probably my favourite so far because he's such an ass, plus he's got the best gadgets! And one thing Valiant has needed is a strong female character, which I'm getting to do with Livewire. I want her to be your favourite too – by the time we get to the second arc, she's going to have a much bigger role."

Q&W's goat. Everyone loves the goat.

"Priest is one of the legendary comics creators"

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MAKING IT REAL

He's the artist who cast Samuel L Jackson as Nick Fury in *The Ultimates* and breathed life into *The Authority*, and now Bryan Hitch is going it alone, drawing *and* writing *Real Heroes*. **Rob Power** caught up with him to find out why now...

If you were a renowned artist who had worked with some of the biggest writers in the game – including Mark Millar, Warren Ellis and, er, Jonathan Ross – you might be a little worried about your debut gig as a writer/artist. But not if you're Bryan Hitch, widescreen artist extraordinaire and now scribe with *Real Heroes*.

"I aimed to write from day one of my career in 1987," says Hitch. "Richard Starkings and Simon Furman were my then editors at Marvel UK, and their advice was always that it's easier to break in as an artist than it is as a writer. When I worked with Warren Ellis on *The Authority*, his assumption was I should just go ahead and write as soon as we'd finished that year together. He's never really understood why I haven't done it since. Mark Millar always said I should be doing it, and even Mark Waid, who I never really got on with creatively, told me that there would be a point when I would discover I didn't need a writer. Some point or other it was always going to reach critical mass and happen, and in this case I'm really pleased it did. It's such a fun project to be working on."

The project is *Real Heroes*, a six part miniseries being published by Image that's part *The Avengers*, part *Galaxy Quest*, as a bunch of actors playing superheroes have to step up and save the world for real.

"As an idea to play with, it goes right back to childhood when I used to watch old films like *The Prisoner Of Zenda*, the plot of which many Americans will be familiar with from the movie *Dave* with Kevin Kline," he says. "That idea, that the normal guy gets to be royalty or the president, is kind of an attractive idea, and I'd often thought that would make a good superhero concept – that the guy that looks like Superman gets to be Superman. It sort of developed from that idea, and last year, when I started mulling on what I was going to do after I'd finished *America's Got Powers*, it sort of came back into my head. But it came back with a new spin on it, which was the cast of Avengers does *Galaxy Quest*.

"It's not the gentle pastiche of *Galaxy Quest*, it's a much more dramatic presentation. It's very big scale and very widescreen – as I'm known for – and it's a really big superhero story, but I'm trying to find a new spin on that: interesting ways of presenting characters within the format of the big superhero stories. That's getting harder and harder because all those great ideas that we're so used to seeing in comics are now up there on the big screen, and more and more people are familiar with superheroes through movies rather than through comics.

"The audiences that go to movies are not the audiences that read comics, otherwise they wouldn't be making $1.6 billion at the box office. That only comes from reaching a much wider audience. So the logical thing was to work with the idea of actors as superheroes. It gives you a shorthand too – they're used to the language of the superheroes, they play them in the movies, they know who their characters are supposed to be but they themselves are not those characters. So when they're presented with a situation where they literally have to be those characters, just because they can hang in front of a green screen, or run around and pretend to be super speedy, or super

This superhero lark is harder than it looks.

strong, just because they're used to working with special effects, doesn't mean they're necessarily heroic people.

"So you still get the pathway from the relatively normal guy to what makes a hero – what makes them willing to put their lives on the line for ordinary people. And that movie shorthand means you can do away with an awful lot of origin story. Macguffins – you can do it in just a few paragraphs or a few short pages. Everybody knows the archetypes, everybody knows how it works, we're all speaking the same language. But again, these characters aren't yet heroes so it's still that 'fish out of water' and 'heroes journey' kind of scenario."

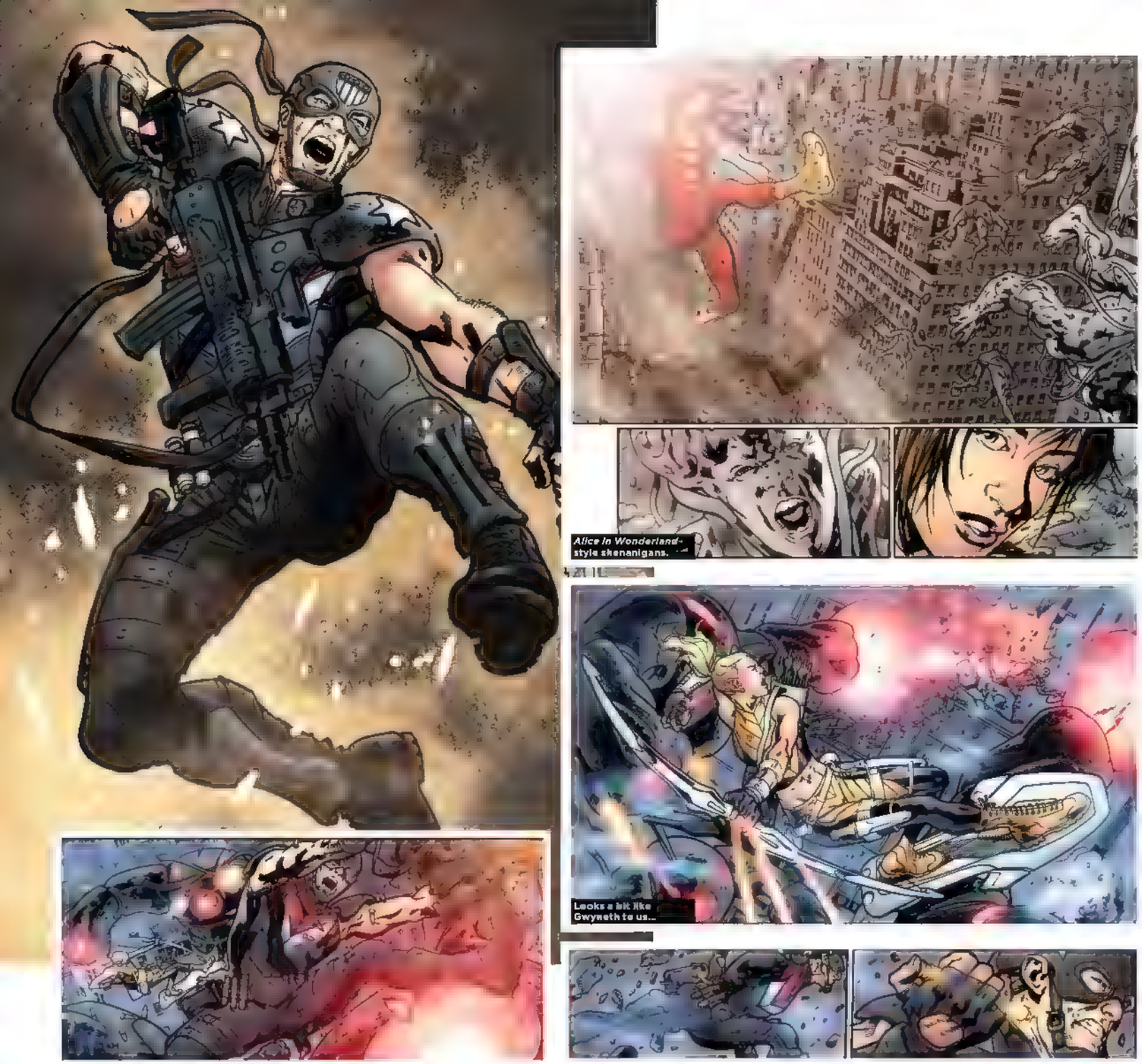
CELEBRITY JUICE

As a high concept, *Real Heroes* has clearly got legs but, as we all know, many a great high concept has been scuppered by bad characters and shoddy workmanship. Thankfully, Hitch had no shortage of inspiration for his cape-clad thespians. "It's odd when you say something like, 'They just all popped into my head', but that's kind of what happened," he says. "There are certain archetypes: there's the guy who is the recovering drug addict. His superpower comes from injecting a cocktail of drugs, like a super-soldier serum, and that presents you with an interesting character dynamic. You've got the singer turned actor – in this case it's a young kind of rapper/ballad combo singer. He's world famous for his music but this is his first acting gig. This is the biggest superhero franchise in history so these guys are very, very famous.

"As a kid, the guy who plays the Olympian, Chris Reynolds (who, incidentally, is named after Chris Pine, Chris Hemsworth and Malcolm Reynolds from *Serenity* for fans out there) had a father who was a firefighter on 9/11, and he watched as the South Tower fell. He's grown up with the idea of his father as a hero, and he's ended up as an actor playing a superhero. At his heart he still has these issues. He's never going to be a leader, that's not his nature, but he is very quiet, very unassuming and very much looks up to this idea of having a father figure to operate from, which has been missing. He's the last person in the world to really lead a group of superheroes.

"You've got a celebrity dieter – magazines are always doing this. Is Jennifer Aniston putting on weight or is she pregnant? That kind of thing. She's made a lot of money not just as an actress »

> **More and more people are familiar with superheroes through movies rather than through comics**



but as a celebrity dieter. She's got this paranoid idea of not being too big, and, of course, her superpower is to grow really tall or to shrink really small Again, you can play with that as a character type, so there's a shorthand way of getting to aspects of their personalities

"So it really wasn't difficult to find these guys, they just sort of popped into my head And when I write them, I seem to be writing *them* and not just language, they seem to have their own way of looking at a scene, which is usually a good indication that you've got some characters right."

With characters like these, you'd have thought that there was plenty of opportunity for Hitch to indulge in one of his favourite pastimes — basing their looks on real celebrities and actors But maybe not quite so blatantly this time

"Once I'd created the characters it was easy to cast them," he says "I played the same game to start with, which was who would I want in these roles? There were a few likenesses in #1 which turned out to be very like those characters, because I kept thinking about those actors So I've actually gone back and redrawn them so that they look more like they do in #2 and #3 — as I drew them more, and got more familiar with them, they got further away from potential likenesses

"I could easily cast this movie several times over, so if and when that comes around I'll have my thoughts' I suppose I always like to try and find somebody to base a character on, especially if it s a new one, as you have to think about how they think, how they act and how they work. They become those characters rather than the stunt casting Obviously I'm known for that, having cast Samuel L Jackson as Nick Fury from the early days

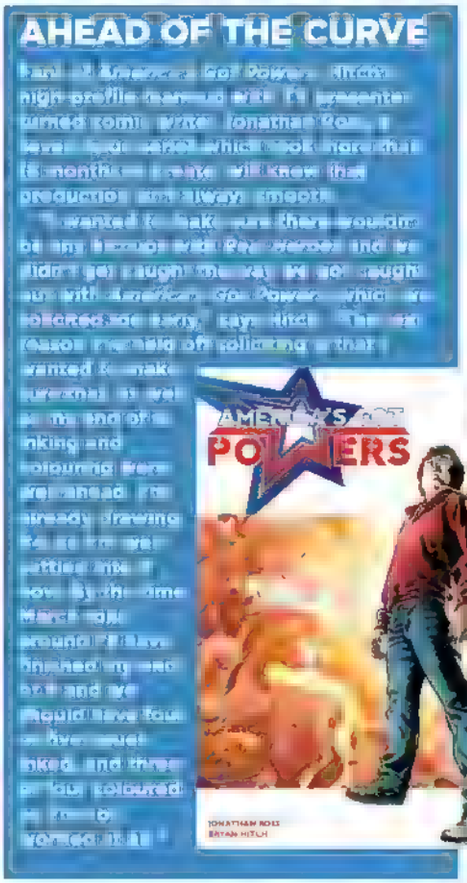
"Mark Millar and I talked about this a while back. In those days, that was very much a novelty as we d never seen famous people playing superheroes, and apart from a handful of movies you d never really seen superheroes in the movies to any great degree, especially Marvel characters. So playing the casting game in 2001 was a different kettle of fish to today, where you're used to seeing characters that you're familiar with on the big screen. When we were doing *The Ultimates* we were thinking of Thor as a young Brad Pitt, and of course, in looks, Hemsworth is very much a young Brad Pitt."

ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

The big challenge on *Real Heroes* was never going to be picking the superstar models for the characters, though As Hitch's first stab at handling both the writing and artwork, it represents a bold step in a new direction. So how has it been going? Pretty well, actually

"I sort of make it up as I go along," he says. "I hate the kind of criticism that goes, 'The writers were just making it up as they went along.' I rather think 'Isn't that the point?' That's kind of what I've done I had an outline I knew how I wanted it to end. Beginnings and ends are always relatively easy The beginning is the easiest part because it's the question you ask, it's the premise of the story what if this happens? And you kind of know roughly where you want to be at the end, but

Expect some rip-roaring action scenes.



> **I hate the criticism, 'the writers were just making it up as they went along'. I think, 'Isn't that the point?'**

you've got this huge gap between the two where you need to answer that question

'So I worked on the outline – by that I mean I walked the dog* a lot and did a lot of thinking. I thought about writing a full script, but as I started to do that it made less and less sense. What I do is write a fairly solid note form outline for each issue, tighten that up as much as I can for the beats, and then use the thumbnailing process of drawing as a way of scripting for myself. Then I make notes on the computer about the dialogue, sometimes extremely specific and complete dialogue for the scenes that are action-led rather than dialogue-led. I go back and forth between the two until the issue is drawn and written. It seems to be working quite well, really.

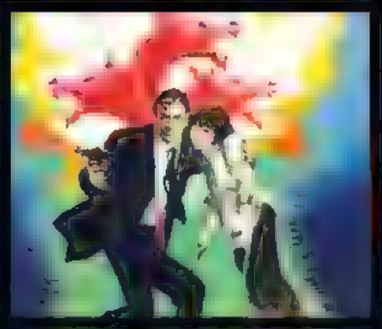
"I've been telling stories a long time – this isn't exactly my first rodeo! I've been coming up with ideas and thinking of stories my whole life. I've worked with some of the best guys in the business and I've picked up a lot of ideas about what works and what doesn't. It felt very natural just to do it the way I thought it ought to be done. Certainly, as an artist I'm a bit of a seasoned old hack. I kind of know what I'm doing there, so I was an easy artist to write for!"

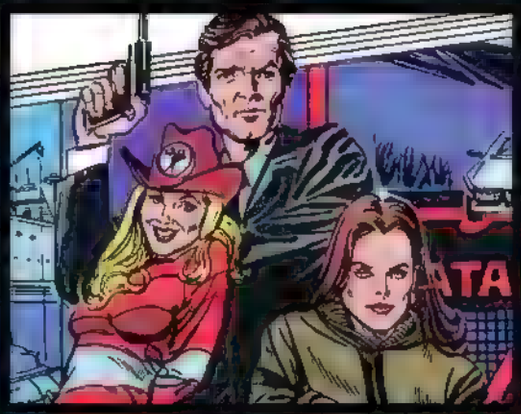
"I think anybody who knows the work I've done – especially on key projects such as *The Authority* or *The Ultimates* – has a good idea of the kind of scale and detail I can deliver with the work I can draw. But as every writer says, at heart this is a character story. There might well be an enormous plot, and huge, world shattering events, but it's also a story about six people who find themselves in a completely new scenario that they'd never been prepared for. It's not a comedy, it's not a pastiche, at heart it's a big character drama played against huge events that you can only get in big scale comics. The action in this is going to make *The Avengers* seem like a Merchant Ivory production." CH

***Real Heroes** #1 is out on 26 March from Image.*

* She was a mangy old retriever called Willow Persephone, says Hitch. Two are Willow the Witch and Buffy's bestie. Tosh, you're a coincidence. Tosh.

The Americans sent a C.I.A.* man down to work with him—a fellow named Leiter.
Has he found anything?
*Central Intelligence Agency—the American Secret Service





JAMES BOND

In a new ongoing feature, **James Lovegrove** examines how iconic characters from the world of prose fiction have made the leap to becoming comic heroes. First up: the world's best-known secret agent

He's the secret agent whose name and number the whole world knows: Bond, James Bond. The suave super-spy with a gun in his pocket that means he *is* pleased to see you.

Beginning in 1953, Ian Fleming turned out a dozen novels and eight short stories featuring the character before the author's death from heart disease in 1964. Since then, thanks to an extraordinarily successful movie franchise and a series of follow-up novels penned by such diverse hands as John Gardner, Raymond Benson, Charlie Higson, Sebastian Faulks and William Boyd, James Bond continues to be one of the highest-profile literary properties around.

007's fortunes in the world of comics, however, have been as mixed as a dry martini.

STRIPPED FOR ACTION

The *Daily Express* was first to hit on the idea of a James Bond comic strip. When the newspaper approached Fleming with a view to buying cartoon serialisation rights in 1957, the author was sceptical, fearing the transition to an illustrated medium would cheapen his work. "I have grave doubts about the desirability of this," he said. "Unless the standard of these books is maintained they will lose their point."

Nonetheless he overcame his misgivings, and the following year the *Express* began adapting the novels in chronological order, starting with *Casino Royale*. Anthony Hern provided the script for that strip, but Henry Gammidge then became writer for the next 12 entries in the series, apart from *Dr No* which was written by Peter O'Donnell of *Modesty Blaise* fame.

For the most part the adaptations were faithful, and the art by John McLusky was tidy, gritty and intensively textured. The *Thunderball* strip was cut short owing to a contractual dispute between Fleming and *Express* proprietor Lord Beaverbrook, but was later concluded for syndication to other newspapers.

In 1966 writer Jim Lawrence and Czech-Russian artist Yaroslav Horak took over the job, and the quality rose several notches. Their first effort was *The Man With The Golden Gun*, based on the final Fleming novel, published posthumously in 1964. In Lawrence and Horak's version, Bond is given a more personal motivation for going after Scaramanga – the master assassin has very nearly killed a friend.

> **"007's fortunes in comics have been as mixed as a dry martini"**

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY JOHN McLUSKY
I DECIDED THE TIME HAD COME TO PUSH DRAX OVER THE EDGE
WELL, MISTER BOND— DON'T YOU THINK I AM AN EXTRAORDINARY MAN?
I THINK YOU ARE A LUNATIC— AND A HAIRY FACED LUNATIC AT THAT

Their take on *The Spy Who Loved Me* adds even more to the original: a lengthy opening sequence, in which Bond foils a SPECTRE blackmail plot in Canada, supplies story detail that the novel only sketches out in flashback.

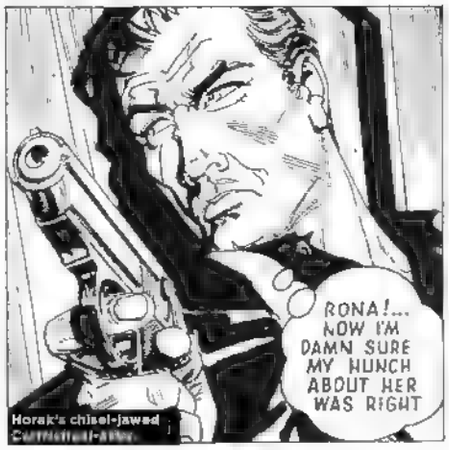
Thereafter – aside from an adaptation of the 1968 novel *Colonel Sun*, the first ever Bond continuation, written by literary lion Kingsley Amis under the pseudonym Robert Markham – Lawrence and Horak generated all-new material. Lawrence, whose only other comics credits are scripts for issues of the UK weekly *Super Spider-Man And Captain Britain*, certainly knew his way around a great Bond an title – "Double Jeopardy", "Sea Dragon", "Death Wing" – but he could lapse into puerileness, both in titling and plotting, as in "The Golden Ghost", "The Black Ruby Caper", "The Xanadu Connection" and "The Phoenix Project".

The stories adhere to the Fleming formula of exotic locations, alluring females, bizarre villains, world-imperilling schemes and casual sadism. There are cool gadgets: a bullet-firing briefcase, a cigarette lighter that issues a jet of knock-out gas and a backpack fitted with rotor blades. Recurring characters from the canonical novels appear. M, Miss Moneypenny, M's Chief of Staff Bill Tanner, and Bond's CIA pal Felix Leiter. The villainous Dr No even crops up in *Hot-Shot*, having assumed the new identity of tiger-loving Indian businessman Huliraya.

GROWING WEIRDER

As the strips progressed and the '60s gave way to the '70s, wackier fantastical themes began to creep in. There's a remote-controlled death-dealing automaton in "Fear Face", an

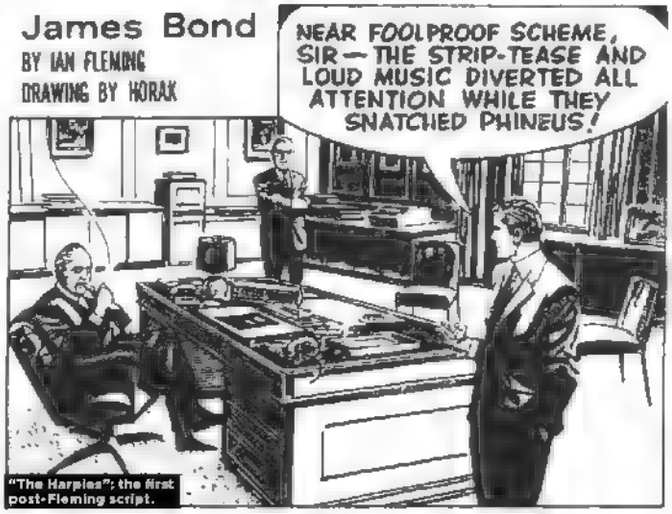
Newspaper © Ian Fleming Publications Ltd. Titan Books



Horak's chisel-jawed Carmichael-alike.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER— A STUNNING SCENE!
I'VE HIT THE JACKPOT!... THEY'RE DISMANTLING THE ROBOT SUB TO GET AT ITS 'ULRAC' CONTROL DEVICE!
558
Bond's as suave in water as he is on land.

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK



"The Harpies"; the first post-Fleming script.

Have a guess who's this strip's villain...

eerie fireball of doom in "Starfire", space-alien kidnappers in "Nightbird", and a vampire cult in "League Of Vampires". Everything has a rational, mundane explanation, but still these elements would seem more at home in *The Avengers* – or indeed *Scooby-Doo* – than Bond.

Lawrence's dialogue has its fair share of clunky moments. Bond is forever calling women "luv" and men "mate", entirely out of keeping for a former naval officer and an alumnus of Eton and Fettes. He talks of a new club drug that can "groove you out of this world on absolutely cosmic highs" ("Die With My Boots On") and defends a moment of cautiousness with the line "I never did dig that Light Brigade jive" ("The Girl Machine"). Really, 007?

Horak's art, though, is consistently impressive. His Bond has the forelock so often mentioned by Fleming, and isn't a slavish representation of either Sean Connery or Roger Moore. If anything, the character here resembles Hoagy Carmichael, the American singer whom Fleming himself felt Bond should look like. Though the choppy, episodic nature of the daily newspaper strip format can become tiresome when the stories are read in collected form, they're still hugely entertaining and on occasion are an improvement on some of the non-Fleming novels (we're looking particularly at you, Jeffery Deaver, and your *Carte Blanche*).

FILM ADAPTATIONS

Comics adaptations of the films have appeared sporadically over the years. The first was *Doctor No* in *DC Showcase* #43 by Norman J Nodel, which was published in the UK in *Classics Illustrated*. It includes a scene cut from the movie, in which a manacled Honey Rider is menaced by crabs, and No himself is killed by electrocution rather than drowned in bird poop.*

Marvel did *For Your Eyes Only* and *Octopussy* in the early '80s, the former boasting Howard Chaykin pencils utterly ruined by Vince Colletta's inks, the latter not a bad effort from Steve Moore and Paul Neary.

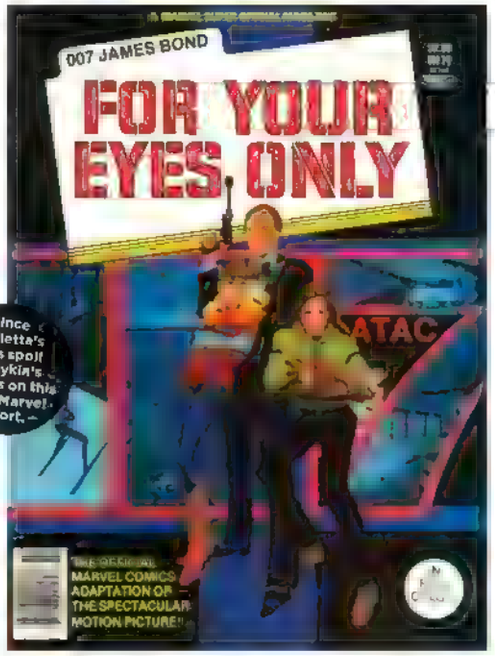
Eclipse Comics then produced *Licence To Kill* in 1988, which saw Mike Grell on writing and art duties. This was a good fit of creator and material, not least since Grell had already produced the very Bond-an *Jon Sable, Freelance* earlier in the decade. *Permission To Die*, an all-new three-issue prestige format Bond miniseries from Grell, followed a year later, and it's far and away the best comics 007 tale there has been. Grell cleaves to the Fleming originals in plot structure and tone, while

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK

Bond leads a masterclass in "patronising".

"Pucker up sweet cheeks."

Several hours later, James Bond, otherwise known as Secret Agent 007, stepped into the offices of the Secret Service
Hi, Moneypenny.
James, where have you been? We've been scouring London for you.



Moore and Neary's half-decent *Octopussy*.

James Bond Jr

James Bond Jr was a spin-off TV cartoon series of the early '90s, neither much-loved nor much missed. The title character is 007's nephew – not son, as the "Jr" might lead you to assume – who attends an English private school along with brainbox Horace "IQ" Boothroyd III, grandson of Q, and mulleted über-jock Gordo Leiter, son of Felix.

Villains include kid-friendly renderings of canonical characters such as Goldfinger, Odd Job and Dr No and of movie henchmen such as Nick Nack and Jaws, alongside bespoke baddies with punsome names like Walker D Plank, Ms Fortune and Barbella.

Marvel produced a tie-in comic of this juvenile – in every sense – farrago which lasted 12 issues. The first five adapt episodes of the series. The remaining seven are distinguished only by being early work from future superstar comics scribe Dan Abnett.

Permission To Die: Bond at his best.

at the same time acknowledging the influence of the movies. There's a "pre-credit sequence" which gets Bond into a dinner jacket and kilt, followed by a double-page spread which offers a montage of images from the films.

The story then sees Bond, having been provided with the latest sidearm by Q Branch, travel to Hungary and rendezvous with Luludi, gypsy daughter of Kerim Bey from *From Russia With Love*. The mission is to extract the niece of a former Soviet rocket scientist across the border into Austria and thence to Idaho, where said rocket scientist, Erik Wiziado, has fashioned himself a high-tech lair inside a former US Navy training base. Disfigured by torture, Wiziado covers half his face in a featureless mask and plays a huge, elaborate pipe organ, much like the Phantom of the Opera – and yes, he's a nutjob who intends to frighten the world into total nuclear disarmament by lobbing an atomic warhead at Victoria, capital of British Columbia.

It's a serious story with a moral message but it doesn't stint on the softcore sex and hardcore violence. The art in the middle issue is a letdown, Grell relying heavily on assistants, but overall the quality remains high. Best of all, Wiziado, unlike other Bond villains, has a conscience about his heinous acts, and is more misguided philanthropist than raving megalomaniac. You're left wondering, as Bond does, if the world might not have been a better place had his plan succeeded. "Sacrifice a few to save the many. Who knows, it might have worked ... and I'd be out of a job."

TOOTHLESS

In 1992 Dark Horse picked up the Bond baton and commissioned *Serpent's Tooth* from Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy. It must have seemed like a good idea – a dead cert, even – since these two were the writer/artist team that had had such a hit with their mid-'70s run on Marvel's Bond-inspired *Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu* (see page 162).

Serpent's Tooth, alas, is a bit rubbish. Moench has Bond investigating the disappearance of agent 009, who was sent to Peru to track down nuclear missiles stolen from a British submarine. The baddie is Indigo, a biogeneticist who has tried to cure himself of a rare blood disease via injections of reptilian DNA. The results have left him with serpentine features and a desire to set off earthquakes which will wipe out 83 per cent of the earth's population; what parts of the planet remain intact will be his to rule and repopulate using girls kidnapped from local native Indian villages. Oh, and he has a pair of albino henchmen and a bunch of genetically recreated extinct animals too.

Moench shoots for arched-eyebrow one-liners in the Roger Moore mode, but rarely hits the mark. In all, *Serpent's Tooth* is just too

[4] DC had a 10-year option in its *Doctor No* contract to continue publishing Bond comics if it sold well. Unfortunately no one remembered until the 10 years were almost up. DC started talks to launch a 007 series, but then Connery said he'd quit after *Diamonds Are Forever*, so DC let the option expire. D'oh.

Sadly cancelled after just two issues.

We've got a hunch this one's a clunker. Sorry.

Serpent's Tooth lacked the magic of *Shang-Chi*.

LEGION Annual #5

There have been numerous Bond parodies and homages in comics over the years, but honourable mention must go to *LEGION Annual* #5 – for all the wrong reasons.

All of DC's 1994 annuals came under the *Elseworlds* banner ("heroes are taken from their usual settings..." etc), and since there was always an espionage element to the exploits of the Licensed Extra Governmental Interstellar Operatives Network, a Bond pastiche would seem like a no-brainer.

And no brain is certainly required to enjoy this laugh-free mess in which Lobo is reimagined as a crude, tuxedo-clad secret agent, first name James, working at the behest of spymaster Vril Dox. He is assisted by Stealth, who is obliged to wear a – get this – bulletproof bikini. Thudding script from Tom Peyer, shoddy art from Mike McKone – this one's a Double-O dud.

On the run from a deadly virus in #2.

science-fictional, too comic-booky, to work as a Bond adventure. And the plot owes more to the movie version of *Moonraker* than it ought.

Better is *A Silent Armageddon* by Simon Jowett and John Burns, which sees Bond assigned to protect a disabled teenaged computer hacker genius, Terri Li, who is being pursued by terrorist organisation Cerberus on account of a sophisticated "worm" program she has created. If one can overlook some very dated "information superhighway" virtual reality gubbins, there's a decent story here and some classy, classically-styled art from Burns. Nice, too, that the principal henchman is the son of *From Russia With Love*'s formidable SMERSH officer, Rosa Klebb (she of the sensible shoes with spring-loaded, poison-tipped blades in the toecaps). It's just a shame that only two issues of a projected four ever appeared, owing to problems with late delivery of artwork.

The two-issue *Shattered Helix*, also written by Jowett, is an effective mini-epic set mostly in the Antarctic, where Cerberus – again – is up to no good, trying to get its hands on a mutagenic virus which uses the human body's own immune system to destroy a person from the inside out. Bond, accompanied by a beautiful climate change scientist and some marines, infiltrates a research lab beneath the ice and faces the almost unkillable Bullock, who has Kevlar implants under his skin. It all ends in explosions and a page's worth of eco-preaching. The art, by David Jackson, is passable, but it would have been a real treat to see the man who provides layouts and colours, David Lloyd, illustrate the whole thing himself.

CLOSING GAMBIT

By contrast *The Quasimodo Gambit*, Dark Horse's final Bond offering, published in 1995, is unmitigated tosh. The script, from the pen of Don McGregor, lacks sure-footedness, eking out a muddled storyline that has something to do with marijuana smuggling and a plan by religious fanatics to detonate bombs in Times Square at Christmas. A minor highlight is a unique torture-by-leeches scene.

Of course, this being McGregor, the comic is hideously over-written. Narrative captions crowd every panel, striving for eloquent literary profundity and missing by a mile: "There was always an undercurrent about New York that James Bond enjoyed, a constant conflict of impressions – from poised artifice to gutter abandon. He relished its staccato ability to change from block to block."

McGregor can't even make his mind up whether he's writing in the past or present tense.

And the art, by Gary Caldwell, is ghastly, stiff, unimaginative, far too reliant on airbrush colouring, with characters all but indistinguishable from one another. The script tells us that the thuggish Maximilian "Quasimodo" Steel has a hunchback, Caldwell can't be arsed to depict this. Perhaps disheartened by the awfulness of *The Quasimodo Gambit*, the Ian Fleming literary estate has not granted any further licences to publish James Bond comics since 1995. This is a shame, because Bond still has huge potential in the medium. In the right hands – those of Warren Ellis, say, or Mark Millar – the mix of low-key heroics, quippy dialogue, glamorous women and slick weaponry could be a winner.

But one shouldn't give up hope. As the end-titles of the movies always promise, "James Bond will return..."

NEXT TIME: The greatest detective of all, Sherlock Holmes.

*Thanks to Titan, whose handsome collections of the Bond newspaper strips are highly recommended. Thanks, also, to Paul Simpson (co-author of **The Bond Files** with Andy Lane) for his invaluable advice.*

NEXT ISSUE

IS THE CINEMA READY FOR WONDER WOMAN?

With Gal Gadot officially announced as Wonder Woman for the *Man Of Steel* sequel, we take a look at the past, present and future of DC's Amazon warrior.

COMIC HEROES #23
ON SALE
17 APRIL
IN SHOPS & DIGITALLY ONLINE

1 HUGHES GALLERY

SCARLET WITCH
PRINT

"Growing up, the Scarlet Witch was one of my favourite characters, mainly because I loved the costume. But, because I like to torture myself needlessly, I came up with a piece that didn't really focus on her that much. That destroyed Sentinel took *forever* to draw, and while I was really happy with the final result, my hand felt like a lobster claw for about a week."

THE ART OF...

ADAM HUGHES

One of the most in-demand cover artists in comics, Adam Hughes cites Toulouse-Lautrec and Alphonse Mucha as influences. Joel Meadows discovers more...

ARTIST PROFILE

American comics artist heavily influenced by European fine artists

EDUCATION
Atlanta, Georgia, US

www.justsayah.com

Adam Hughes began his comics career following Kevin Maguire on DC's *Justice League* book in the late '80s, but soon carved a niche for himself as one of the most in-demand cover artists in comics, drawing classics for *Wonder Woman* and *Catwoman*. He has also drawn interiors for series such as DC's *Before Watchmen: Dr Manhattan* and this year saw him write and draw a story for DC's prestigious *Batman Black And White* series. After decades working in comics, he seems to be in a unique position as an artist.

Comic Heroes: You've become closely associated with drawing female characters. What is it about drawing women that appeals to you as an artist?
Adam Hughes: "Because they're pretty! I have no idea. I've thought of five different answers to this question and they sound like I had to think too hard about them. I don't know what it is about strong, beautiful women that makes me enjoy drawing them. I stopped asking myself the, 'Why?' questions long ago and just accepted the way I am. Also, I think there's a difference between 'examination' and 'dissection'. It's okay to examine something, but maybe not too much. You have to kill a thing to dissect it.

CH: Your work is influenced by artists such as Alphonse Mucha and Toulouse-Lautrec, and the Art Nouveau movement. What is it about Art Nouveau that really connects with you as an artist?
AH: "Everything. The design sense, the graphic qualities, the palettes, the subject matter, the era. It's the one art period where every single aspect holds appeal for me."

CH: How important is it for comic artists to expose themselves to work outside the field of comics and what do you think they gain by looking at art of all kinds?
AH: "I think it's important for comic artists to expose »

2 HUGHES GALLERY

LUKE SKYWALKER
OMNIBUS EDITION COVER

"*Star Wars* came out when I was 10 and nothing else has had the same impact on my life as a creative person. Any time I get the chance to do a *Star Wars* illustration, if possible, I jump at the chance. Of all my *Star Wars* illustrations, this might be my favorite – it's about that wanderlust for travel and adventure that was pretty much only in that first film."

3 HUGHES GALLERY

SILVER SNAIL
COMICS POSTER

"I really like this one because it's one of the *very* few jobs I've done where I get to employ some humour, the stuff usually reserved for my convention sketches. My covers are usually 'serious' and my con sketches usually featured my plebian sense of humour. It was all fun, start to finish and almost no job is like that. The girl trying to put her robot together is Sally and I want to draw her again."

themselves to *anything* outside the field of comics. Comics are better when the people creating them bring a diversity of influences to their creations. I think comic creators solely inspired or taught just by comics and nothing else are cutting themselves short. But I feel that way about every creative endeavour: filmmakers should draw inspiration from things other than cinema, musicians shouldn't just get their ideas from other music."

CH: **You've become best known mostly as a cover artist rather than someone who draws interiors. Is this just because of practical considerations? And how important is the cover for a comic?**
AH: "My career as a cover artist came about simply because I haven't been offered a lot of interior work, for whatever reason. A cover is very important because it's the last line in advertising while also being the first line in storytelling. The cover is how we convince a potential reader into becoming an actual reader: if I can get someone to pick up a comic, then once it's in their hands they will probably thumb through the issue, and hopefully buy it."

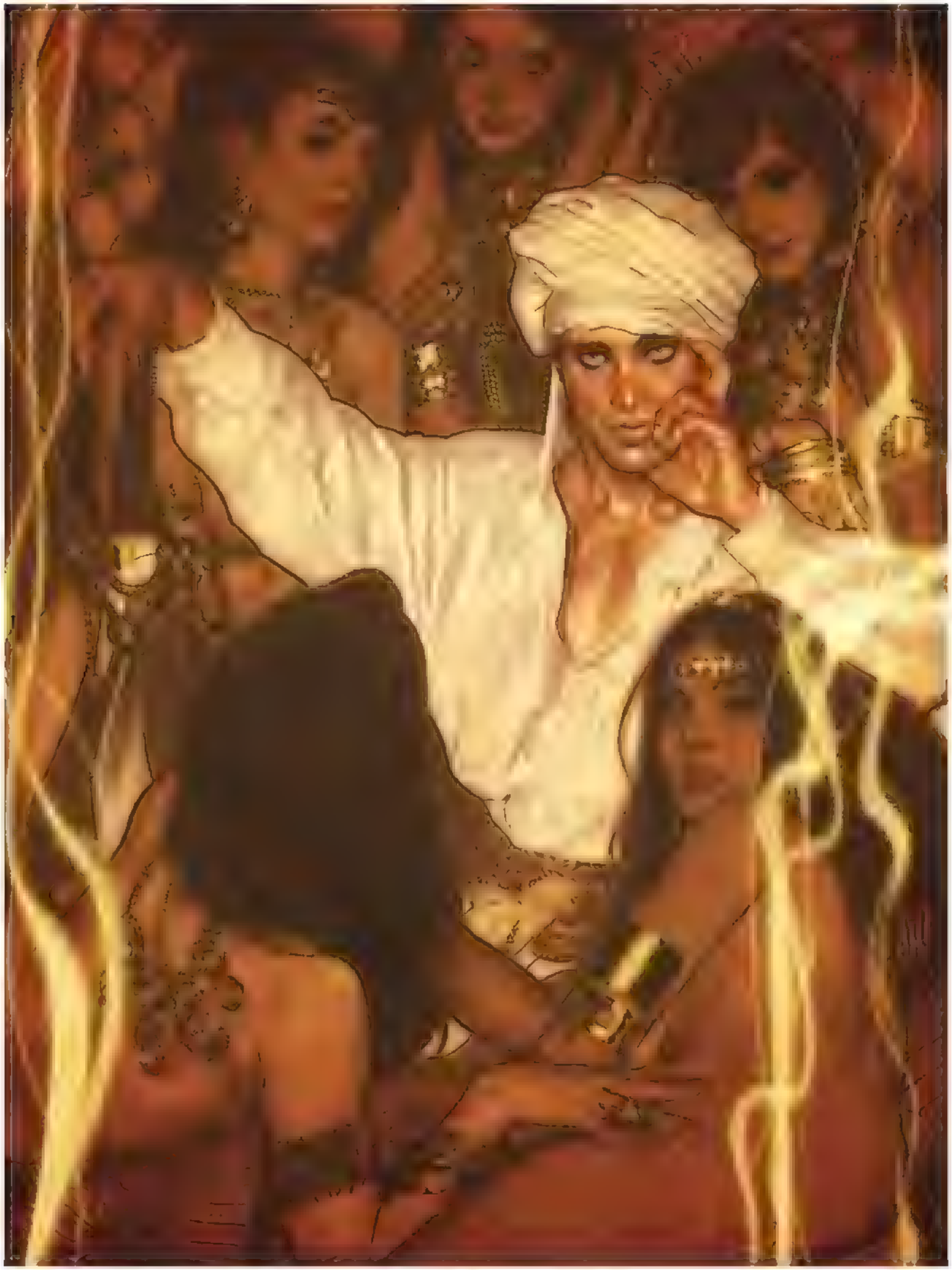
CH: **In 2012, you drew *Before Watchmen: Dr Manhattan* and this year, you have written and drawn a *Batman Black And White* story. What made you decide to take the plunge and go back to drawing interiors?**
AH: "Someone at DC Comics asked me to do the interiors. It's as simple as that. I said yes because I feel like a comic artist that never draws comics. The only problem is that doing covers for so many years has made me slower than ever."

CH: **You wrote as well as drew the *Batman Black And White* story. Are you more confident now about writing your own material and will we see more work that you write and draw yourself?**
"I'd like to write and draw more stories. When I write I don't have the same confidence issues I have when I draw because I really don't consider myself to be a writer. When I draw there's all these expectations of fabulousness. No one has any expectations of me as a writer, so, I'm free to have fun with it."

CH: **You've become closely associated with producing covers for female superhero titles such as *Catwoman*, *Ghost* and *Wonder Woman* and you also do the covers for Vertigo's *Fairest* series. What was it about that series that particularly appealed to you?**
AH: "*Fairest* isn't a superhero comic and I thought it'd be good for me to try my creative hand at something other than superheroes. Superheroes are swell but there's so much more that comics are about, so I wanted to dip my toes in foreign waters."

CH: **What are you currently working on?**
AH: "Wrapping up the final 10 issues of *Fairest* covers, and a bunch of stuff I can't talk about. These questions come literally as I'm closing the deals on a bunch of new and fun assignments. Some will surprise people, and some will make people go, 'FINALLY'."

CH: **Will we ever see *All-Star Wonder Woman*?**
AH: "No, I'm sorry; it's a dead project." CH



4 HUGHES GALLERY

FAIREST #5
COVER

"The main lure of doing this *Ali Baba* cover was being able to take the opportunity to prove to people that I can draw men just as well as I can draw women. End of story. I was surprised after I finished when *Fables* creator Bill Willingham remarked that I'd obviously been inspired by the works of Lawrence Alma-Tadema. My uneducated ass went 'Huh? Wut?' I was just trying to make it look old-timey."

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Now you open your eyes...

A LIFELONG PASSION

A Londoner from Argentina, Oscar Zarate's enthusiasm for comics has shaped his life and fuelled collaborations with Alan Moore and Alexei Sayle, and now his first solo graphic novel, *The Park*. By Paul Gravett

No youthful dreamer in the '50s could resist those comic strip advertisements for the PanAmerican School Of Art in Argentina's capital Buenos Aires. The short strips claimed to be "a real story" about "How An Artist Is *Born*"? It opens with a 17-year-old who supports his family by labouring in a factory but has a talent for drawing. Sending off for the free introduction, he is accepted onto the "Twelve Famous Artists" correspondence course. On graduation his teachers recommend him to a magazine, where in no time he becomes a success, creating comic characters and sketching glamorous models in his studio. The last panel shows the likely lad beaming and relaxing with his pretty wife over a poolside drink, saying, "I feel really happy. This profession is marvellous. It gives me lots of satisfaction."

A young Oscar Zarate couldn't resist. He was convinced that, "Fame, fortune, silk dressing gowns and beautiful women were bound to follow! My parents were very supportive as long as I did my homework. I put my heart and soul into this one-year course but despite getting my diploma, I knew I was nowhere near good enough. However I found out something very important – learning to draw doesn't finish when you get your diploma. Drawing is a lifelong project."

CHILDHOOD DREAM

Among Oscar's tutors were Alberto Breccia and Hugo Pratt, two of the medium's greatest maestros. A lover of comics since before he could read, Zarate once felt that imported American adventure strips like Alex Raymond's *Rip Kirby*, Bob Schoenke's *Laredo Crockett*, Frank Godwin's *Rusty Riley*, or Roy Crane's *Captain Easy* were more accomplished than anything made in Argentina. But his views changed in 1953, when, aged 11, he discovered the atypical Western *Sergeant Kirk* written by Héctor G Oesterheld and drawn by Pratt in *Misterix* weekly. "Sergeant Kirk was a soldier of the 7th Cavalry, who breaks his sword, quits the regiment and decides to live among the Red Indians. This was subversive stuff! Hugo Pratt's art moved me so deeply. This was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I wanted to make people feel what Pratt made me feel."

Leaving school at the age of 14 (secondary education was not compulsory then in Argentina), Zarate landed his first job in the industry through a friend as an errand boy for Editorial Abril, a publisher of weekly comics, including *Misterix*, the most popular selling 250,000 copies every week.

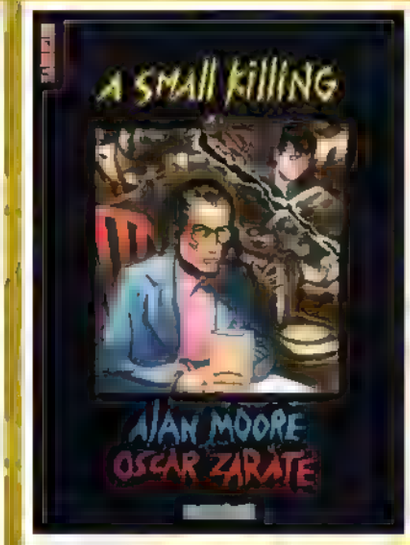
"One of my jobs was to go to the artists' homes to collect the artwork for the following issue. Every week I went into the homes of my gods – Pratt, Breccia, Carlos Freixas, Solano López, Carlos Roume, I began showing them my drawings and I learnt a lot from their very patient comments. I was in heaven. And every month I got my salary as well."

In 1957, Oesterheld left to set up his own comics publishing house, Editorial Frontera, and many of Abril's top artists followed him. "They knew that Oesterheld would provide them with the best stories and they would become better artists. Oesterheld changed the landscape of how to tell stories. No matter which genre, he created excellent human characters. When they opened their mouths, you believed in them." Zarate found work at Frontera too. "By this time, I had progressed to sticking the balloons on the frames and drawing the tails!"

During this period, however, comics were being criticised for corrupting young people, while other influences were distracting Zarate. "I was reading contemporary fiction, Karl Marx and looking at painters like Van Gogh, »

Opposite page: *The Park*, a 160-page project in radiant watercolours that grew out of occasional short stories Zarate created for Argentinian comic magazine *Fierro*.

I KEEP COMING BACK.
ALAN MOORE/
OSCAR ZARATE
I KEEP COMING BACK
DON'T MEAN TO DO IT. IT JUST HAPPENS. WRITE ABOUT A PLACE AND YOU'RE CEMENTED TO IT. THIS TIME A FEATURE FOR BBC 2
TWO DRAG QUEENS FROM COMMERCIAL STREET BEFORE THE CAMERA UNIT'S VAN ORCHIDS NOT LONG FOR THIS UNHAPPY CLIMATE
THEY'VE EMPTIED THE WHOLE EDIFICE FOR US TO FILL WITH REDUNDANT DEVICES FUMES AND OVERSTATED UNDERLIGHT
HOSTEN THE CARETAKER. A STILL AND PRIVATE PRESENCE. I GENTLY PROTECT YE. IF THE CHURCH A WEARY HAT BAND WITH HIS GENTLE BRIDE



PROBABLY NOBODY IN THERE WELL THERE'S SOMEBODY, OBVIOUSLY "OCCUPIED" BUT JUST SOME OLD WOMAN SLEEPING FROM BOEING BLADDER, JUST SOMEBODY I'VE NEVER MET BEFORE AND NOT OH OH LOOK, OUT THE WINDOW. LOOK AT THE SKY OVER THE AIRPORT. ALL THOSE WEIRD COLOURS. AMERICAN COLOURS. IT'S BEAUTIFUL IT...LOOKS SO PERFECT IT ALMOST LOOKS
ANOTHER COFFEE? LET ME JUST TAKE YOUR OLD CUP THERE...
THANKS.

Modigliani, Lautrec and Japanese artists. I watched not only American movies but the films of the French Nouvelle Vague [New Wave]. Gradually I questioned my childhood dreams and thought comics were 'inferior' to 'real' art. This was one of the most distressing times in my life, my first real crisis. I quit comics, or at least the idea of being a comics artist."

Zarate got his secondary school qualifications and after studying architecture, ended up in advertising. "That was the level of my confusion, with all my left-wing ideology, I became a very successful art director in the Wasserstein Thompson advertising agency."

Turning his back on this success, Zarate made the life-changing decision to leave his homeland in early 1971. "The political situation in Argentina was getting worse, the right-wing military was in power, friends were arrested and some disappeared. It was better to leave the country, hoping that eventually everything would improve and I could return."

Travelling around Europe, he arrived in London in May 1971, where he was surprised to find an alternative culture close to his sensibility. "Meanwhile in Argentina, more people were being killed by the military and some of my friends escaped to Europe. It was no time to think of returning. The birth of my son in London made the decision for me. I stayed in London for good."

Looking for work, he approached British publishers with whom he shared some political empathy, like The Writers and Readers Co-Op, who commissioned him to illustrate *Introducing Freud* with co-founder and writer Richard Appignanesi. His first graphic book in England has been a bestseller for 35 years, translated into 24 languages.

"Around the late '70s, Britain was a difficult place to make my own comics, so I adapted Shakespeare's *Othello* with the complete text and Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. It was fun but I wanted to tell stories with no specific roadmap or genre, stories about people I can believe in. I wanted to find out, page after page, what it is to be a human being."

Rather than adapting another dead playwright, Zarate began seeking out living writers to collaborate with. In 1984 he contacted alternative comedian Alexei Sayle after reading his travelogue parody *Train To Hell*. "I thought what he was saying in his words had to do with what I was saying in my pictures. The starting point was something on London. We'd both moved here 16 years ago, Alexei from Liverpool."

Gestating the project together and responding to Thatcher's Britain, they released *Geoffrey The Tube Train And The Fat Comedian* in 1987, part socio-political commentary, part Sayle's skewed autobiography, part warped version of *Thomas The Tank Engine*. Zarate explains, "The book tackles serious issues. It's not fatalistic, it's pointing out what is going on. It's more like a mental state than any specific topical satire."

Next, Zarate connected with Alan Moore in 1988 post-*Watchmen*, while contributing to the anthology *AARGH!* (Artists Against Rampant Gay Homophobia), published by Moore's Mad Love to protest against Clause 28. Zarate's pitch a spark – an adult pursued by a child – so intrigued Moore, that the two of them began evolving it co-operatively through a synergistic meeting of minds into *A Small Killing*, published in 1991. The story concerns Timothy Hole, an advertising executive who has, as Zarate comments, "...countenanced such a big betrayal, that he loses himself. He goes back to the place where he was born looking for something of what he used to be." This allegorical, redemptive critique of callous

Above left: Moore collaborates on "I Keep Coming Back" from the Zarate-edited *It's Dark In London*, a grim and grimy comics anthology examining the capital's underbelly.
Above right: The Eisner award-winning *A Small Killing*

“I can see my work improving. I’m even more in love with comics than before”

Thatcherite values stands up as one of Moore's most s ngu ar and sign ficant non-genre graphic novels

Zarate wou d conspire with Moore once more on an unofficial coda to *From Hell*, charting Moore's state of m nd on visiting the Spita fie ds pub where Jack the Ripper picked his v ct ms. “I Keep Com ng Back” ran in *It's Dark In London* in 1997, an amb tious collect on of new graphic short stories by accla med comics scribes such as Neil Gaiman and writers new to the med um like Iain S nclair and Ste a Duffy Zarate also edited t and in 2012 expanded t for Se fMadeHero s re-issue

By far Zarate's most productive co aborator s h s fe ow countryman and former colleague in advertising, wr ter Carlos Sampayo Another Argentine exile, Sampayo settled in Spain, where he scripted short pieces drawn by Zarate for *Alter Linus* magazine in Ita y, later translated in *Crisis* n Br tain When the anticipated readership of adult graphic nove s in the UK proved slow to materialise, Zarate sought opportun ties in French-language comics and resumed his partnership with Sampayo As with Moore, Zarate works with Sampayo “in a very organ c, natura way. I present Carlos w th an idea and if Carlos says yes, we beg n slowly building a story around it.”

PARK LIFE

Zarate's latest might have a so debuted n France, but he was attracted to the fresh energy in the Br tish scene. “I see a growing readership w th a genuine interest for com cs telling straight f ction and a new breed of publishers too.”

The Park is set in and around Hampstead Heath, which Zarate views as “a m rac e happen ng every day in North London, where you can get lost in its woods for a few minutes, and dream about a time before industr a life, about yourse f in history and an oak 400 years o d telling you everything s all right.”

The book contrasts this serenity with one inc dent wh ch triggers repercussions among two fathers and their offspring “These four characters respond to the aggression according to their total makeup and social position The r disagreement g ves the pulse to the story.”

The Park a so addresses tensions, st prevalent today, between generations and c asses. “Contrary to what many people want us to believe, the class strugg e is still on. It may take a different, more confusing form, but issues of inequa ty and abuse of power are as bad as ever, if not worse.”

Zarate is now entering h s seventies and s in his prime. “I'm working again with Richard Appignanes on a book about S gmund Freud's first case. And deas are floating around my head for my next so o book. I'm charged, I can see my work mproving, I'm even more in love w th com cs than before This s where I ove to be now, writ ng and drawing.”

Above: *The Park* s beautiful watercolo ured panels depict how Londoners interact with the green oasis that is Hampstead Heath

The Park *and* ***It's Dark In London*** *are both available through SelfMade Hero.*

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NEW COMICS REVIEWED, RATED, AND ARGUED OVER, SOMETIMES ENDLESSLY

Extended Family

Our ratings explained, superspy gadget-style.

SUBMARINE LOTUS	★★★★★
LASER WATCH	★★★★
POISON PEN	★★★
FAKE NIPPLE	★★
INVISIBLE CAR	★

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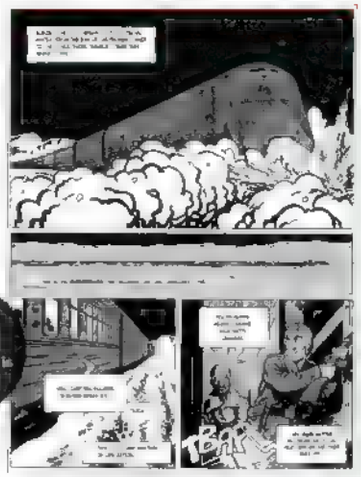


SNOWPIERCER

Polar Express meets *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

WRITERS: Jacques Lob & Benjamin Legrand
ARTIST: Jean-Marc Rochette
PUBLISHER: Titan
OUT: Now
★★★★

If there are two things the French do well, it's sex and death. That's what *Snowpiercer*, a cult classic French title (originally titled *Le Transperceneige*) – appearing here in English for the first time – is all about. Although admittedly you might not think so to begin with. It's a new ice age – we're not sure why, although everybody's pretty sure one government or another either dropped the bomb or hit the big red button marked "DO NOT PRESS" – and humanity is on its last legs. More accurately, it's on its last bit of track. Because the human race's final few are battling it out for survival on a giant train called Snowpiercer.

If it sounds like the worst commute ever, that's because it is. The train never stops, and it's split along fascistic class divisions, with the government in first class and the poor folk in the cargo hold at the rear. As an analogy of society it's pretty clumsy, but we'll forgive Jacques Lob, who wrote *Snowpiercer* in the late '70s, because he's created a claustrophobic dystopia that's up there with the best of them.

The train is policed by soldiers that look like they were airlifted in from Soviet Russia, the conditions are bleak all over and the people are revolting (quite literally). When Prokoff attempts to escape his life in the filthy rear and works his way up the train with human rights activist Adeline, we're given a whistle-stop tour of the train journey from hell.

People are turning to dodgy drugs and dodgier sex, not to mention priest-engineers, to forget about their inescapable plight. Lob conjures up a series of wonderfully macabre concepts, like the vast lump of regenerating synthetic meat (called "Mama") that butchers hack to pieces to feed the plebs, as well as a procession of characters that wouldn't be out of place in Mega-City One.

In other words, this is gritty, slightly grim SF in the grandest tradition of literary dystopias, from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to, surprisingly, *The Wizard Of Oz*. With a twisty thriller of a plot, a wildly effective chase dynamic and evocative black and white artwork from Jean-Marc Rochette, it's easy to see why *Snowpiercer* has been made into a film*. (See our news story on page 15.)

An intelligent, uncomfortable but impossible-to-put-down book, Jacques Lob has created a story that shouldn't really work, but does. There's a strength of conviction and a furious anger at the heart of *Snowpiercer*, and it'll stay with you long after the train has reached its final destination. **Rob Power**

* The film has a really massive cast, including Chris Evans, Tilda Swinton and Ed Harris, but not having a release date in the UK and US. Apparently, the kids are busy planning to hack it to bits.

YOU MUST BE VERY BRAVE HALAROON
OH WILY WALY'S IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH CLAMORILLA?
SHE DISAPPEARED JUST AFTER YOU ARE FED INTO THE HANDS OF MACCABEUS
OUIIIIIIIIW BOOM BOOM HOW
TING TING TING OH, DON'T DECEIVE ME, OH, NEVER LEAVE ME. HOW COULD YOU TREAT A YOUNG HERO SO?
ALL RIGHT THAT'LL DO NO ONE ASKED FOR A FUNERAL MARCH
TOMORROW MACCABEUS WILL BE PROCLAIMED KING OF THE PICTS
AND HE HAS DECIDED THAT CLAMORILLA WILL BE HIS QUEEN
PICTS WHA HAE
DON'T SAY THEY'VE MADE YOU LOSE YOUR VOICE AGAIN!
A KIND OF OTTER
Och aye the noo! Asterix and Obelix head off on a Scottish jolly...
FRESH FISH!
BUY MY NICE FRESH FISH
UNHYGIENIX
HUH!
FRESH S TE AND HER
HERE'S MEDICINE FOR HER
THANKS TO IT SURVIVED IN THE LOCH THERE'S PLENTY OF USELESS WATER BUT THE MACCABEES DRINK MINERAL WATER
OUIIIIIIIIW BOOM BOOM
HUSHABYE BABY ON THE TREE TOP WHEN THE WIND BLOWS YOU'LL FALL IN THE LOCH
AH A LOCH AND LOCH TIME PLAYED BY OUR BARDS
CLACK CLACK CLACK CLACK CLACK
ALL THIS NOISE DURING THE MEAL I CAN'T BE A GOOD HEN
OBELIX!
THINK BEFORE YOU HIT ANYONE.
THESE PEOPLE MAY RESEMBLE THE BIRDS MORE THAN WE RESPECT OURS
AH!
YOU BEET

ASTERIX AND THE PICTS

WRITER: Jean Yves Ferri
ARTIST: Didier Conrad
PUBLISHER: Orion
OUT: Now
★★★★

After René Goscinny died in 1977, *Asterix* co-creator Albert Uderzo forged on without him, writing as well as illustrating the strips. There was, however, something missing. Uderzo introduced incongruous plot devices such as flying carpets and extraterrestrials into the stories, yet ironically the magic was gone. Though drawing as beautifully as ever, he could not conjure up scripts of the same quality; his collaborator had been a master of plotting and sparky characterisation.

Now, with Uderzo's blessing, two new creators have stepped in to fill his and Goscinny's sizeable shoes. Jean-Yves Ferri and Didier Conrad are both well-established names in the world of bandes dessinées, and both, by coincidence, were born in 1959, the same year the indomitable Gaul made his debut in the Franco-Belgian comics anthology magazine *Pilote*.

TARTAN ARMY

Asterix And The Picts opens with a tattooed kilt-clad Pictish warrior washing up on a beach in Armorica close to the "little Gaulish village that we know so well". Young Macaroon is frozen inside a block of ice but, once thawed, he reveals that his fiancée has been kidnapped by Maccabeus, the wicked chieftain of a rival clan, who has designs on marrying her as well as forging closer ties with Rome.

Asterix and Obelix, of course, offer to help, and after a sea crossing during which, inevitably, they run into and sink the crew of useless pirates whom they traditionally encounter at least once on every adventure, they fetch up on the shores of Caledonia. Immediately they meet the Loch Ness Monster, and this is the only bum note the book strikes. Nessie here is a cute, friendly creature resembling the titular beast in the old Disney movie *Pete's Dragon*, and is an unwelcome throwback to the fantasy elements of the Uderzo-only stories. (Yes, we realise that Getafix's magic potion which gives the Gauls superhuman strength is to some extent fantastical – but it's as an inseparable embedded part of the *Asterix* mythos.)

Otherwise it's fun all the way as our heroes bash Romans and treacherous Picts, save the feisty maiden, and help unite the warring clans. There are plenty of jokes at the expense of the Scots. Bagpipes, whisky, caber-tossing, tartan, Hadrian's Wall, Robbie Burns – every known stereotype of Celtic life is mined for humour. But it's done so good-naturedly that you'd have to be Alex Salmond to take offence.

Conrad's art mimics Uderzo's perfectly, down to the last brushstroke. Frankly, it's hard to tell the difference between a page of *Asterix And The Picts* and a page of any of the previous *Asterix* albums. This is pastiche of the purest, most loving and skilful kind.

As for the English translation by Anthea Bell – the colleague with whom she usually partnered up, Derek Hockridge, died earlier this year – it's as witty and pun-packed as ever.

With Asterix now over 50 years old, and with 34 albums already under his belt, his future appears to be in safe hands. **James Lovegrove**

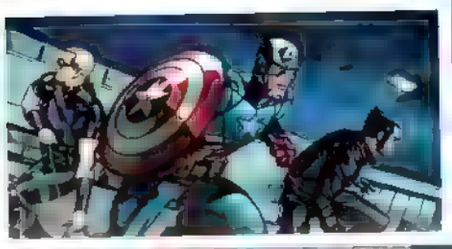
Oh, hell no
Tony! Get back here
Thor, we're going to give you enough coverage for you to get yourself and Jan on the ground
Hey, I didn't
You are outranked, Captain
Don't you always tell people you're certain when you're-
Tony, I could shoot you out of the air right now and all that'd happen is that I'd get a medal
Okay. So how are we doing this?
Same way we always do. Sloppily and chaotically, with a lot of explosions
Bruce?
If he goes off while we're in the air we're all dead.
You go. I'll take care of him. One way or the other.
Steve, everyone's going to need to get me on the ground sooner rather than later.
Earth's Mightiest don't suit "worthy".

AVENGERS: ENDLESS WARTIME

WRITER: Warren Ellis
ARTIST: Mike McKone
PUBLISHER Marvel
OUT Now
★★★

Avengers: Endless Wartime is the first in a series of original graphic novels showcasing major Marvel characters. Hardcover and oversized, with exquisite book design by Rian Hughes, everything about it says "serious" and "event". And it is a big deal, if only because it represents the return of über-scribe Warren Ellis to mainstream comics after a lengthy absence.

That said, *Endless Wartime* is a rather dour affair that often threatens to buckle under the weight of its worthiness. The plot centres on drone strikes being carried out against made-up Middle Eastern nation Slorenia and the first half of the book consists mostly of the Avengers discussing the rights and wrongs of outside intervention in the affairs of a sovereign state and the ethicality of big corporations becoming involved in war. All very topical, but vacillation and soul-searching ill befits the characters. These are Earth's Mightiest Heroes, not Earth's Mimsiest.



Ellis's dialogue crackles as always, but he's let down by McKone, who seems able to do only two facial expressions – grim or smiling – which undermines the sly, snarky wit in the speech-bubble captions. The mix of sombreness and superheroics doesn't quite gel, and one finds oneself pining for the jaunty, screw-you attitude that characterised Ellis's runs on *The Authority* and *Nextwave*.

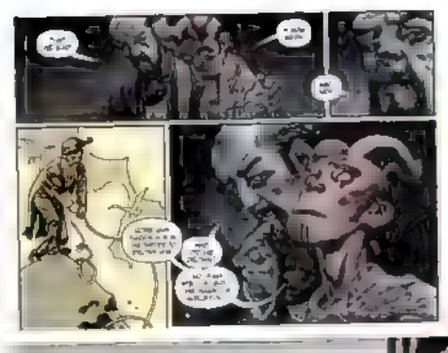
James Lovegrove

HELLBOY: THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS

WRITER: Mike Mignola
ARTIST: Duncan Fegredo
PUBLISHER Dark Horse
OUT Now
★★★★★

The Midnight Circus is a tale of Hellboy when he was literally a boy, before the sawn-off horns and the cigar-chomping and the "punch first, ask questions later" approach to dealing with eldritch menaces. It's 1948, and young Hellboy has been Trevor Bruttenholm's ward for four years and is chafing against the restrictions imposed on him as a permanent resident at the Connecticut headquarters of the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense.

One night, he sneaks off into the woods to smoke his first fag, and is drawn to a sinister supernatural circus. Having watched a phantasmagorical performance in the Big Top, he is then tempted by a sideshow which offers all the lures and enticements of the adult world. The story explicitly references Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* while foreshadowing events that will unfold much later in Hellboy's life (and indeed death).



Mignola's script is pitched perfectly, balancing the sinister and the sentimental in the manner of Ray Bradbury, who himself updated Collodi with his tales of dark carnivals that prove dangerously seductive to innocent youth.

Fegredo's art, meanwhile, is never less than gorgeous. His use of blocky inks mimics Mignola's own style for the scenes set in the real world, but he switches to a more ornate line-and-wash for the fantasy realm of the circus and something looser and weirder, akin to the work of Paul Pope or Troy Nixey, for a few panels summarising *Pinocchio*.

The Midnight Circus is a tour de force from both creators, and an essential purchase. **James Lovegrove**

Staranko proves he's still got it on *Batman: B&W* #2.

Part romance saga, part superhero action adventure.

The shuffling hordes kick off in Coast City.

All images courtesy of DC Comics

DC ROUND-UP

It's a good time to be a bad guy in the DC Universe, it seems...

FOREVER EVIL
WRITER: Geoff Johns
ARTIST: David Finch
OUT: Now
★★★★

KILLER FROST
WRITER: Sterling Gates
ARTIST: Derlis Santacruz
OUT: Now
★★★★

BLACK HAND
WRITER: Charles Soule
ARTIST: Alberto Ponticelli
OUT: Now
★★★★

PARASITE
WRITER/ARTIST: Aaron Kuder
OUT: Now
★★★★½

BATMAN: BLACK AND WHITE
WRITER/ARTIST: Various
OUT: Now
★★★★

SUPERMAN/WONDER WOMAN
WRITER: Charles Soule
ARTIST: Tony S Daniel
OUT: Now
★★★

The New 52 DCU isn't just a dark place, not even a darker place than the Marvel Universe, but the darkest place you can possibly imagine. This is borne out in the ***Forever Evil*** crossover storyline which has spun out of *Trinity War* and sees the Crime Syndicate from Earth-3, that villainous warped-mirror version of the Justice League, arrive on Earth-1 claiming to have killed their heroic counterparts. In issue #1 of the core title, their grand, dramatic entrance takes place in the wreckage of the Justice League Watchtower before an assemblage of DC's biggest bads, depicted by David Finch in a spectacular four-page foldout spread. As evidence of their triumph, the Crime Syndicate toss Superman's tattered cape, Aquaman's trident and Wonder Woman's lasso into the crowd of villains, and their leader Ultraman bluntly announces: "This world is ours."

The identity of the mystery man responsible for bringing them over is revealed as that alternate Earth's Alfred Pennyworth – because there's nothing worse than a butler gone bad, is there? Especially one in a bowler hat. Meanwhile Nightwing's secret identity as Richard Grayson is publicly exposed, and there are a couple of chilling, subversive scenes with Ultraman showing exactly how he is the anti-Superman. In one, he snorts pulverised Kryptonite like cocaine to power himself up. In the other, he repositions the moon in front of the sun, creating a permanent eclipse so that he will not be weakened by solar radiation.

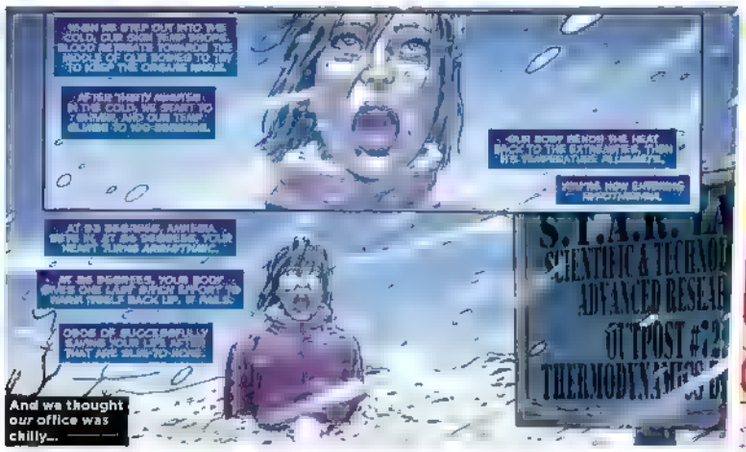
Issue #2 of the mini-series begins with possibly the worst-drawn rat in the history of comics, but Finch acquits himself well thereafter as we see Lex Luthor assuming the mantle of Earth's protector. (And why not? He doesn't want anyone but himself in charge.) Luthor dons his old battle armour and unearths a secret project of his, a vat-grown Superman copy who looks not unlike Bizarro and will serve as a mindless superpowered sidekick. The payoff comes as a battered, reeling Batman and Catwoman return via a Boom Tube from elsewhere, carrying the mangled, possibly lifeless remains of Cyborg.

So it's high-stakes stuff, the DCU in chaos, the status quo overturned, and the consequences are rippling out through the rest of the line, to the extent that every DC release in September came with a villain's name stripped across the cover masthead and, inside, a one-off tale featuring said villain. These issues were either origin stories or interstitial narratives slotting into the overall crossover plot.

Thus ***Killer Frost*** #1, aka *Justice League Of America* #7.2, tells how STAR Labs physicist Dr Caitlin Snow is transformed by a freak accident at an Arctic research facility from naive eager scientist to cold-hearted ice-wielding villainess, whereas ***Black Hand*** #1, aka *Green Lantern* #23.3, sees the wielder of the Black Lantern ring land on Earth and, discovering that the planet is in the grip of darkness and

> **"Parasite is a grotesque monstrosity but the script imbues him with humanity"**

Forever Evil's epic four-page splash: villains big and small.



evil, generate a zombie army to ravage Coast City. The former comic nicely demonstrates the antagonistic co-dependency between hero and villain, since if her nemesis Firestorm is dead, so dies Killer Frost's one hope of a cure for her subzero condition. The latter, meanwhile, benefits from sublimely dark, scratchy pencil work from Alberto Ponticelli, who brought such urgent, dusty realism to the recent Vertigo *Unknown Soldier* revamp.

Parasite #1 (*Superman* #23.4) is also good, except only so, not least thanks to Aaron Kuder's artwork. His Parasite is a grotesque, physically warping monstrosity, but the script, also by Kuder, imbues the character with humanity and pathos. Bike messenger Joshua Allen isn't a bad guy, just a loser and a bit of a jerk, until a run-in with the "giant booger monster" that menaced Metropolis in *Action Comics* #20-22 mutates him into a purple, leech-faced energy vampire.

These Villains Month issues all come with alternate "3-D Motion" covers for an additional dollar. They are things of beauty, eye-boggling lenticular extravaganzas which have made the comics they adorn collector's items. Whether or not each is worth a whole extra buck, or sterling equivalent, is another matter. But that surely doesn't bother the eBay speculators.

Batman: Black And White makes a welcome return with a six-issue mini-series showcasing short tales, five per issue, by various writers and artists. The earlier volumes of *B&W* were spectacular, with rarely a dud to be found in the contents, and this new run has started strongly.

"Driven", by John Arcudi and Sean Murphy, reveals hitherto unexplored depths in Batman's relationship with his Batmobile. "Head Games", by Howard Mackie and Chris Samnee, delves into another relationship, the strange, creepy connection between the Ventriloquist and his dummy Scarface.

Those are the highlights of #1, and #2 has a couple of gems as well. "Winter's End" features a rare art job by comics grandmaster Alex Niño, illustrating an effective mini-epic by Jeff Lemire, and there's a dark but touching Man-Bat story by Dan DiDio, rendered in gorgeous photorealistic ink-and-wash by JG Jones.

The one real disappointment in this anthology series so far is Neal Adams's "Batman Zombie". Once a great innovator and trailblazer, Adams just seems old fashioned and dated these days, and although his unpenciled, detailed pencils here are a treat to behold, his preachy script is hopelessly weak and craps out with an honest-to-gosh, actual "it was all a dream" ending.

Finally, with Superman and Wonder Woman now an item in the DCU, here comes ***Superman/Wonder Woman***, wherein Kryptonian and Amazonian negotiate the minefield of relationships, their situation made all the more difficult because they're two of the most recognised and most powerful beings on the planet. As superheroes they can face an extinction-level threat like Doomsday side by side, but what do they do in their down time as Clark and Diana? Will concern for each other undermine their effectiveness in battle? And what happens now that pictorial evidence of their affair, which they're trying to keep a secret, looks set to enter the public domain?

The first issue is slightly underwhelming but offers plenty of promise. Nice, too, to see a comic about mature, responsible adults finding love. It makes a refreshing change from the usual dorky hormonal teenagers. **James Lovegrove**

All images courtesy of Marvel Comics

MARVEL ROUND-UP

The crossovers are crossing over as Marvel universe collapses in on Marvel universe...

INHUMANITY
WRITER: Matt Fraction
ARTISTS: Olivier Coipel, Mark Morales, Leinil Yu, Dustin Weaver, Garry Alanguilan & Israel Silva
OUT: Now
★★★★

CATACLYSM: THE ULTIMATES' LAST STAND
WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTISTS: Mark Bagley & Andrew Hennessy
OUT: Now
★★★★

IRON MAN
WRITER: Kieron Gillen
ARTISTS: Joe Bennett & Scott Hanna
OUT: Now
★★★★

AMAZING X-MEN
WRITER: Jason Aaron
ARTISTS: Ed McGuiness & Dexter Vines
OUT: Now
★★★★

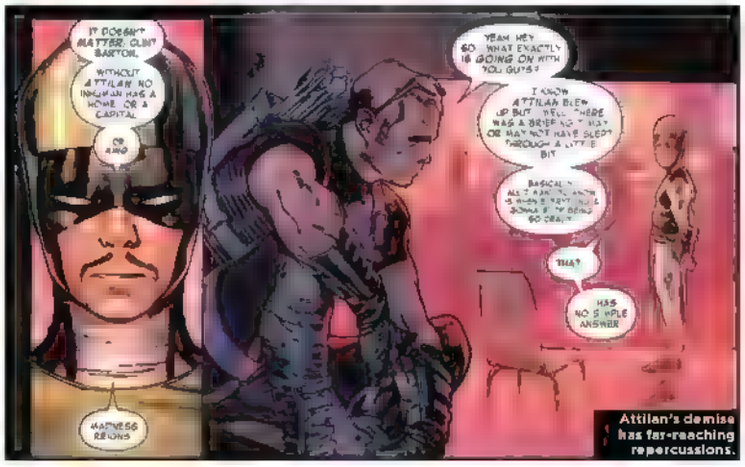
With *Infinity* dovetailing seamlessly into *Inhumanity* it appears that the Marvel Universe has now become one great big nonstop crossover. Indeed Matt Fraction's one-shot primarily functions as a handy recap of Jonathan Hickman's exhilarating but sometimes perplexing intergalactic epic, at least as far as the formerly isolated Inhuman Royal Family are concerned.

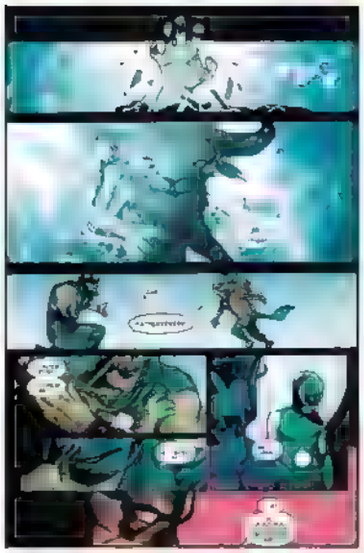
The half-alien master race's mystical, traveling home city of Attilan – most recently to be found on the moon – was dramatically destroyed during Thanos's murderous rampage. This unleashed the transformative effects of the mutagenic Terrigen Mist upon an unsuspecting human populace, in what turned out to be a cunning conspiracy hatched by the stoically silent Inhuman monarch Black Bolt and his usually treacherous brother Maximus the Mad.

It's rumoured that Marvel wants to repurpose the Inhumans as its cinematic equivalent of the Merry Mutants – with a dash of *Game Of Thrones*-style regal intrigue thrown in for good measure. *Infinity* has already emphasised the parallels, and highlighted Thor and Loki's tempestuous familial bonds, but both are absent and presumed dead at the start of ***Inhumanity***, which is largely told from the perspective of the Inhuman's arch strategist Karnak.

At the behest of Black Bolt's distraught queen Medusa, he uses his ability to detect the inherent weakness in things to discover the devastating truth behind Attilan's fall. With its exposition-heavy narrative, *Inhumanity* doesn't really boast any new developments for anyone who has also previously read *Infinity*. But aided by Olivier Coipel's beguilingly fluid linework – with some seamless flashbacks from Leinil Yu and Dustin Weaver – Fraction keeps the pace taut until the final tragic twist. It's a shame then that Fraction will now not be penning the new *Inhuman* monthly, which will be helmed by Charles Soule when it debuts in April.

Not content with wreaking all manner of temporal havoc upon the regular Marvel Universe after the *Age Of Ultron* conclusion last summer,


IT DOESN'T MATTER, CLINT BARTON.
WITHOUT ATTILAN, NO INHUMAN HAS A HOME. OR A CAPITAL.
OR KING.
MADNESS REIGNS
YEAH. HEY GUYS. WHAT EXACTLY IS GOING ON WITH YOU GUYS?
I KNOW ATTILAN BLEW UP BUT WELL, THERE WAS A BRIEF SO-THAT-ONE-MAY-NOT-HAVE-SLEPT-THROUGH-A-LITTLE BIT.
BASICALLY, ALL THE INHUMANS WERE BORN WITH THEIR POWERS BECAUSE OF THE TERRIGEN MIST BUT NOW THEY'RE ALL GONE.
WHAT?
HAS NO SIMPLE ANSWER
Attilan's demise has far-reaching repercussions.



“Bagley and Hennessy do an excellent job of making the world-eater seem *very* scary”

Brian Michael Bendis is now doing the same to its Ultimate equivalent in ***Cataclysm: The Ultimates' Last Stand***. The barriers between realities have frayed and the classic Galactus has slipped through dimensions and merged with the nanite hive mind that constituted his Ultimate self to become an even more formidable deadly force.

Not having eaten for aeons, the ravenous cosmic world scoffer naturally heads to Earth and begins consuming the planet, starting off with poor old New Jersey.

Ultimate wall-crawler Miles Morales takes centre stage in the impending crisis as he joins the Ultimates' motley but intriguing combo of Iron Man, Captain America and Thor, and three quarters of the now defunct Fantastic Four. After forming an uneasy alliance with the evil Ultimate incarnation of Reed Richards, the pair make a mercy dash to the main Marvel Universe.

Bendis, who's reunited here with his old *Ultimate Spider-Man* foil Mark Bagley, neatly balances some tender moments with the fast-moving plot, making for a far superior read than the more lacklustre *Age Of Ultron*. And considering that Galactus spends most of the first two issues doing little more than towering ominously over New York, Bagley and Hennessy do a really excellent job of making the world-eater seem very, very scary.

DESIGNS ON A HIGH TECH LIFE

As a revisionist masterstroke, ***Iron Man*** #17's revelation that Tony Stark is not Howard and Maria Stark's biological son, and that he has an adoptive brother in the shape of the iron lung-bound Arno Stark, aka Iron Man 2020, is up there with Bucky Barnes's unmasking as the Winter Soldier or The Black Glove being Bruce's long-lost relative Thomas Wayne in *Batman RIP*.

With Tony returning to Earth after his outer space exploits, new arc "Iron Metropolitan" establishes Shellhead as Marvel's premiere sci-fi superhero by emphasising the visionary futurist aspect of Tony's character.

In a bid to make up for lost time, the brothers pool their vast intellects to transform the abandoned Mandarin City – which eerily brings to mind *Skyfall* arch-villain Silva's Macau island headquarters – into a utopian metropolis. But with the Mandarin re-emerging as a kind of sinister Green Lantern in the unlikely shape of British radical journalist Abigail Burns, the idyllic atmosphere doesn't last long.

Riffing off the groundbreaking ideas of British designer Matt Jones – whose intriguing quote "The city is a battlesuit for surviving the future" prefaces #18's first instalment – and boasting striking art deco covers by *Mister X* artist Paul Rivoche, writer Keiron Gillen explores the indelible impact that living in such a high-tech environment can have on an ordinary human being.

Often known for his pedestrian pencils, Joe Bennett initially seemed like a poor replacement for previous artists Greg Land and Dale Eaglesham, but there's a real dynamism to his pages, with #18's double-page spread of the Armoured Avenger flying over the abandoned Mandarin City really worthy of close study.

With his tenure on *Wolverine And The X-Men* drawing to a close, Jason Aaron is transferring to the all-new ***Amazing X-Men***, which sees the return of Nightcrawler to the X-verse if not to life itself. Very much emulating the former title's jocular humour, the five-part "Quest for Nightcrawler" finds Logan and his mutant charges venturing beyond the schoolroom as some stray Bamfs lead them on a fantastical sojourn to discover the fate of the apparently late blue elf.

Throw in a few flying pirate ships and the slapstick comedy initially threatens to overwhelm the swashbuckling drama of the unfolding plot, only for Aaron to deftly send chills down your spine as we see how a bemused Firestar – a plucky replacement for Kitty Pryde – and the equally-out-of-their-element Iceman and Storm struggle to cope in the eternally fiery underworld realm Hell might freeze over but coupled with Ed McGuinness and Dexter Vines's trademark sleek cartooning, this is Aaron on top form. X marks the spot indeed. **Stephen Jewell**

With his genius, Greg's yet another Simon Pegg-alike.
GREGORY HAVE A RIB
NO THANKS
SEE GREG PREFERS BONELESS TOO
DOESN'T MANX HAVE SOMETHING STUCK BETWEEN HIS TEETH

IDW ROUND-UP

IDW makes its play for "the new Image" status

WRAITH

WRITER: Joe Hill
ARTIST: Charles Paul Wilson III
OUT: Now
★★★★

INDESTRUCTIBLE

WRITER: Jeff Kline
ARTISTS: Javi Garron & Salvi Garcia
★★½

Two new IDW titles see the company edge yet further into Image territory, with smart, well-realised genre launches that take their cue from the violent, twisting atmosphere of a good HBO series and only touch upon the spandex, if at all.

The more impressive by some way is ***Wraith***, by Joe Hill – Stephen King's son, of course, and a bestselling horror writer in his own right – and artist Charles Paul Wilson III. It springs out of Hill's recent epic vampire novel, *NOS4A2*, in which, amongst other things, a Very Bad Man called Charles Talent Manx abducts children using his 1938 Rolls Royce Silver Wraith, a car with the giveaway titular registration number and a fuel tank that takes souls, not petrol. This is a different type of vampire, for it's not blood Manx is after but – slightly nebulous, this – a child's very innocence, sucking the life out of them and turning them into monsters. *Wraith* acts as a prequel to the novel, and expands upon it, some of this material is stuff cut from the final version of the book.

Drawn in a handsomely scratchy style almost reminiscent of Carlos Ezquerra's – I particularly liked the cutaway shots of a moving van, showing the five people inside

> **"It's not blood Manx is after but a child's very innocence"**

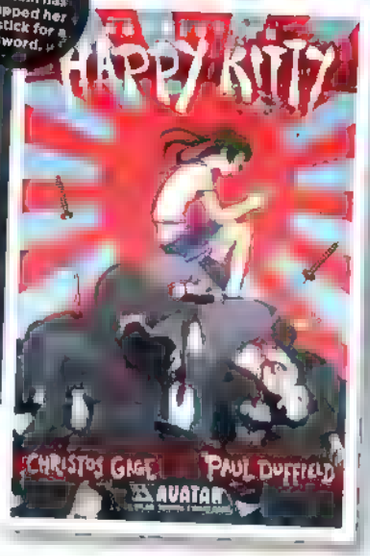
as it trucks down a winding and dangerously remote road – *Wraith* keeps the tension screwed high, even when all that's happening is a bunch of people sitting around talking. The first issue introduces us to Manx, who looks like a funeral director with plenty of rodent in his DNA; the second adds a mixed bag of convicts and their jailers, all of whom have mysteries to hide. The result is a hard-edged crime mystery with a very creepy tone and a nicely low-key use of the supernatural.

Indestructible meanwhile, is a superhero satire of sorts, with geek everyman hero Greg Pincus struggling with girls, crap jobs, and the tyranny of nightclub queues. In this world, superheroes are A-list celebrities, and when Greg's caught up in a late-night robbery, CCTV sees him rise, seemingly unharmed, after taking a point-blank gunshot to the chest. Is he a new hero? Everyone seems to think so, and Greg sees no immediate reason to disavow them of that belief, grasping a real opportunity to live the lifestyle.

Clearly we've got a rather broad satire going on here, with some fairly obvious targets – celebrity culture, mainstream superhero tropes, a few side-swipes at reality TV – taking it straight in the mush. The sporadically pleasing art is a little like John McCrea's, or perhaps Glenn Fabry at his most cartoony, but it's the writer we really have to watch here, for this is the debut book from Darby Pop, a new IDW imprint created by TV writer Kline and well-known editor David Wohl. We're cautiously interested, but not overly so on the meagre strengths of the slightly needy, predictable *Indestructible*. **Matt Bielby**

I'M A DOG!
I'M A DOG!
I'M A DOG!
I'M A DOG!
An innovative take on the gore-packed zombie-apoc...
I USED TO MEET THEM AT THE DOG PLACE.
I USED TO MISS HIM VERY MUCH
I'M A DOG!
I'M A DOG!

HURRY UP
NO FUCK US IF WE BRING HER AFTER ALL
I HEARD SHE'S HIS DAUGHTER HEARD HE REVIVED HER OVA TO SAVE HER MORE POWERFUL HUMAN FED
YOU CAN'T MAKE BAHUNG ITS ARTIFICIAL DUMBASS
AWWW SHE DOESN'T HAVE POWERS HELP E JUST THINK SHE DOES CAUSE SHE'S SO FUCKING GOOD



AVATAR ROUND-UP

Not comics you want anyone to catch you reading on the train...

ROVER RED CHARLIE
WRITER: Garth Ennis
ARTIST: Michael Dipascale
OUT: Now
★★★½

ABSOLUTION: HAPPY KITTY
WRITER: Christos Gage
ARTIST: Paul Duffield
OUT: Now
★★★½

It's a strange company, Avatar, all these big name writers attracted by what seems like a totally hands-off editorial philosophy, each time teamed with unknown artists of varying ability all eager to show just how much detail they can give severed limbs and assorted, more esoteric, bodily trauma. Horror is the thing here; creators seem encouraged to push the boundaries, and – while often impressive – you rarely come out of one of these books not wanting a good wash. It's relentlessly grisly stuff.

Garth Ennis is a master of the nasty, while at the same time bringing human heart and emotion and – quite often – historical perspective too. His ***Rover Red Charlie*** is basically the old Disney classic *The Incredible Journey*, about three lost pets trying to find their way home through a hostile environment, transposed to the post-apocalyptic zombie horror landscape of a *Walking Dead* or Ennis's own hit, *Crossed*. The world has gone mad, people everywhere are taking their own lives or murdering their neighbours – no reason is given – with gleeful abandon, and three dog friends (Basset Hound Rover, Red Setter Red and Border Collie guide dog Charlie) look for an explanation, and try to survive. It's a book packed with horror – an owner sets himself alight as his pet looks on in shock, a gang of small children push a policeman off a balcony to his death, and everywhere brains are bashed in and planes fall from the sky – and heartbreak too. "I'm a dog I'm a dog I'm a dog," bark our heroes at their humans, but no one's listening, "Feeders don't hurt dogs," they yelp, but they do.

Just as gruesome – and impressive in its way – is ***Absolution: Happy Kitty*** a one-shot spin-off from the very violent *Absolution* series by writer Christos Gage. That to did of superhumans working for the emergency services becoming so traumatised by what they see they begin killing criminals in secret, and Happy Kitty was introduced as an adrenaline-junkie hitwoman. Now we get her origin story: as a young girl, her parents murdered by a criminal gang, she's saved from life as a whore when the bad guys start to notice what she can do – an almost supernatural obsession with videogaming, and matching dexterity at it too. Now she's brought up as a near-mute assassin enforcer, denied a proper home life or even a real name and rewarded by playtime with a pet tiger.

Happy Kitty is handsomely told in a vaguely manga style by Brit artist Paul Duffield, who's not so good at small girl's faces but excels at brains chopped in two. It's got a cold, morally ambivalent flair alright, but again it's heavy on the violence – in the first issue alone, we counted some 30 one-on-one sword or gunshot murders, and a single threat to cut off a tiger's paw. Grim then, but there's something of the Hit-Girl to this lass, and I expect we'll see her again. **Matt Bielby**

> **Brains are bashed in and planes fall from the sky**

All images courtesy of Image Comics

IMAGE ROUND-UP

An energetic Image has yet more new titles – and yes, they're good

VELVET
WRITER: Ed Brubaker
ARTIST: Steve Epting
★★★★½

SEX CRIMINALS
WRITER: Matt Fraction
ARTIST: Chip Zdarsky
★★★★½

ALEX + ADA
WRITERS: Jonathan Luna, Sarah Vaughan
ARTIST: Jonathan Luna
★★★★

THREE
WRITER: Kieron Gillen
ARTIST: Ryan Kelly
★★★½

Clearly the most dynamic mainstream comic book outfit of the moment – every month brings at least a couple of interesting new creator-owned series – Image is currently putting out more good titles than we can keep up with.

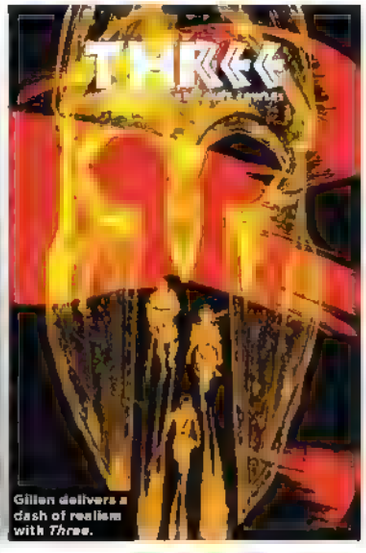
The most immediately impressive of late has been ***Velvet***, from the old *Captain America* team of Ed Brubaker and Steve Epting, this is similarly well-paced, full of intrigue, packed with nicely choreographed action, and heavy on clandestine meetings in shadowy offices and sudden gunfire on rain-soaked streets. With *Cap*, Brubaker and his artists dragged things as close as possible to the Cold War espionage milieu while remaining a superhero book, but *Velvet* is the real deal: a deft cross between the paranoia and confusion of a *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and the larger than life glamour of 60s James Bond. We're in Arc-7, a covert London-based spy outfit – the "secret remnant of an Allied Espionage Group from World War Two", we're told – where suave, dinner-suited 'X-Operatives' make good use of their licenses to kill, and a beautiful quietly ageing secretary called Velvet Templeton seems more capable than anyone gave her credit for.

With the X-Ops being murdered and corruption at the heart of the agency, Velvet – think Miss Moneypenny, with Rogue's streak of white hair – kicks off her high heels, slips on a "stealth suit", and leaps into action: her secret past, as a top field agent, is revealed. Strong female protagonists are hot properties in comics, and Velvet is more intriguing than most – thank her age, her chequered past, her Jason Bourne-like skills, and the very serious worry that, at this point, we really don't know which side she's on. If you're in the market for a cool, multi-layered adventure starring a non-generic kick-ass babe to drool in muted greys, browns and blues, then *Velvet* is a no-brainer.

Yep, it's the Queen singalong scene. Minus the lyrics.

When internet dating fails, there's Ada.

A near future tale of love and loneliness.



Gillen delivers a dash of realism with *Three*.

“If you’re in the market for a cool, multi-layered adventure, then *Velvet* is a no-brainer”

Straight out of the gate, it's one of the year's best comics

WELCOME TO CUMWORLD

Velvet may be the most immediately loveable of the new Image titles, but the strangest and most inventive is surely ***Sex Criminals*** by Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky. It's a love story, a coming-of-age tale, a heist drama and a sci-fi conspiracy piece told in a smart, inventive style that'll have you giggling with glee one minute and rolling your eyes the next. Fraction puts to good use here all the wit he's shown on mainstream books like Marvel's *Hawkeye*, as well as some of the more unusual layouts he's known for, while Canadian artist Chip Zdarsky (best known for the *Extremely Bad Advice* strip he writes and draws for his country's *National Post* newspaper) keeps up effortlessly, using a cartoony style perhaps best described as "Daniel Clowes goes manga".

By modern standards this is a good-value book – there's tons of story, plus up to seven pages of hilarious letters per issue – and a most unusual one at various points we get a couple of pages of made-up sex positions, a four-page sequence where our leads sing Queen's "Fat Bottomed Girls" in a pool hall and a chase through a shop featuring a little brick road showing the direction our hero runs, plus the instruction: "Cue the Benny Hill music."

And what's it all about? Well a young girl discovers that when she orgasms the world stops for a while and she can wander about it with everyone frozen in place. On meeting a guy with the same power, they decide to rob banks – but they hadn't counted on some mysterious, white-garbed "sex police" types hunting them down. Those who venture outside the world of comics occasionally may recognise the basic set-up from Nicholson Baker's 1994 novel *The Fermata*, rather than it being – yawn – yet another comic taking its cue from Tarantino films.

A more touching take on sex and romance is to be found in ***Alex + Ada***, a new solo-ish venture from Filipino-American writer-artist Jonathan Luna, better known for his "Luna Brothers" partnership with younger sibling Joshua. It revolves around a bored peasant-looking office worker called Alex, whose flat, easy life is thrown into disarray when his disreputable grandma gets him an unexpected present. Except for the robot helpers, self-driving cars and fancy communications technology, this is a world much like our own, and the Tanaka X-5 android Ada now finds herself caring for – a beautiful woman-child exhibiting heartbreaking Apple-style user-friendliness – sends him into a right tizzy. Keep her? Return her? Both seems horribly painful options, and then there's the question of what his friends will think.

Two issues in there's been no nudity, no fighting, not even so much as a raised voice, but the shadows of sex and sorrow hang over everything. A quiet story beautifully realised – bravo!

Kieron Gillen's ***Three***, meanwhile, is an interesting reaction to Frank Miller's beautiful, bombastic, historically cherry-picking *300*, the highly-influential retelling of the last stand of the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae. Miller touches on the brutality of the Spartan way of life in his work, but depicts it as heroically single-minded in the main, and skips past those elements we may find more troubling: the extensive slave ownership, the gleeful brutality, the very different attitudes towards homosexuality. Gillen says, hang on a minute, let's try for a more historically veracious version here, and sets his story 100 years after the battle, when Sparta was at the peak of its powers, yet soon to become victim of its own bizarre nature.

Drawn in a bold, thick-lined style by Ryan Kelly, the book encourages us to see the Spartans as capricious and cruel, a warrior caste riding on the back of the helot slaves who make all their posturing possible. When three mismatched helots find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, their lives seem over: how can you fight, or even run from, such a regime? We now follow their surely-doomed attempts to flee the madness of Sparta in what reads like an extra-historical version of one of Garth Ennis's war stories, and comics rarely get better than that. **Matt Bielby**

THE MAN OF BRONZE
DOC SAVAGE
Pulp hero Doc Savage: Tarzan meets Sherlock Holmes
ASH
ARMY OF DARKNESS
STEVE NILES · DENNIS CALERO
DYNAMITE
ASH AND THE ARMY OF DARKNESS
STEVE NILES · DENNIS CALERO
Tom scramble for the cash tills got nasty.

DYNAMITE ROUND-UP

Can licenses make for good comics? You betcha!

DOC SAVAGE
WRITER: Chris Roberson
ARTIST: Bilquis Evely
OUT: Now
★★★

ASH AND THE ARMY OF DARKNESS
WRITER: Steve Niles
ARTIST: Dennis Calero
OUT: Now
★★

Doc Savage is an old-fashioned character in many ways, and this new, loving yet realised ***Doc Savage*** comic is an old-fashioned book – but in the best possible way. Most impressively, it manages within each individual issue to tell a full story – with a beginning, a middle and an end – while introducing a bunch of distinct characters, and setting in motion a number of mysteries and sub-plots. You know, just like comics used to do.

Doc fits easily into the pulp world that Dynamite has made its own in recent years, but he's a rather different sort of character: no masked vigilante, he's instead more like a one-man Fantastic Four, brains and brawn in a single body, a bronze-skinned almost-superman living very publicly in a NY skyscraper. Savage has no superpowers as such, but was extensively trained from birth by world-class experts in the sciences, the martial arts and more.

Set very early in Clark Savage Jr's career, the Dynamite version heaves with references to the original stories and gives the impression, at least, of depicting a believable '30s Manhattan. Bilquis Evely's art is clean and well-paced, and if it doesn't have quite the moodiness or mythic power of the '70s Marvel run featuring the character, it's an undeniably handsome book.

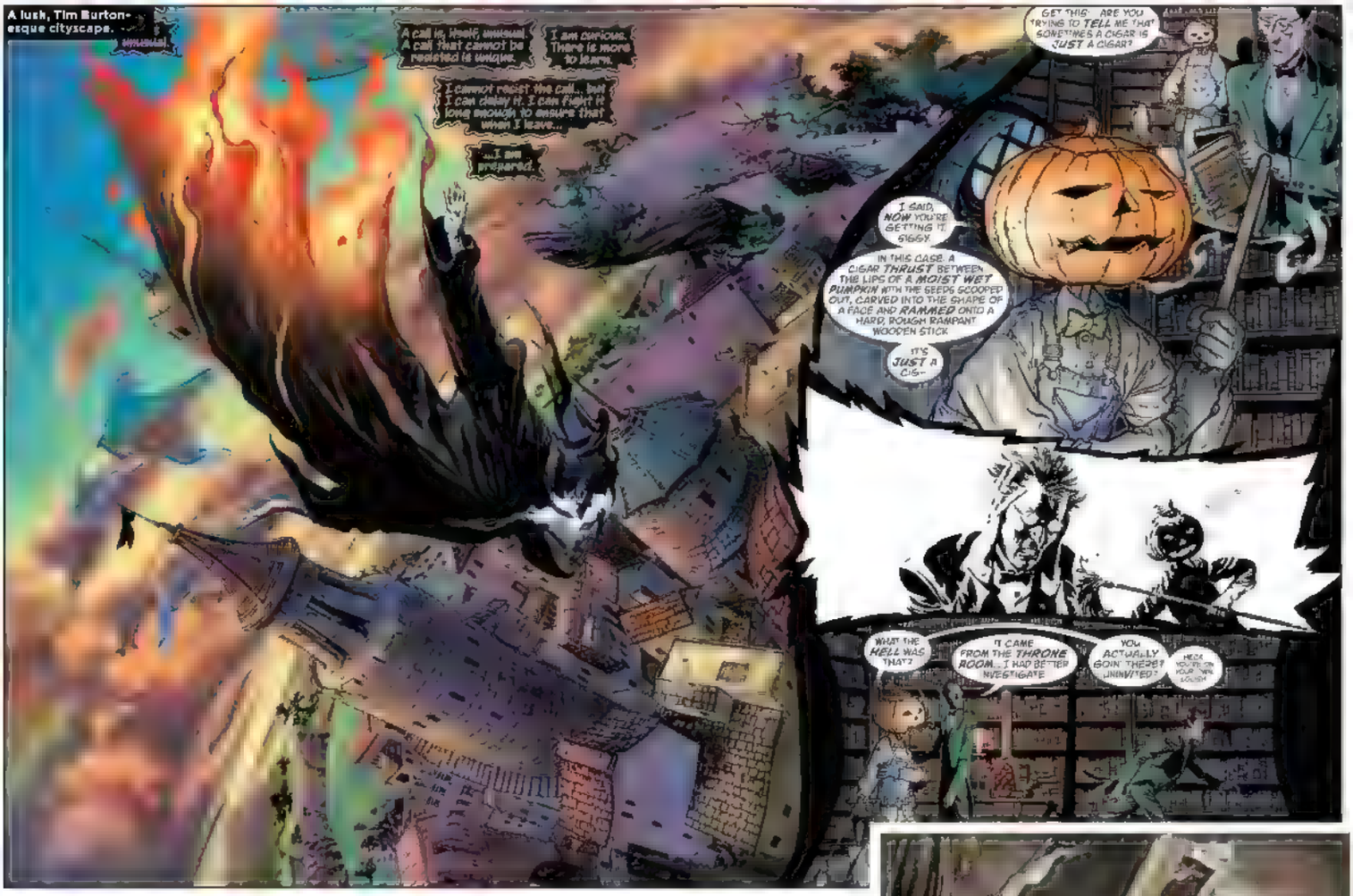
Writer Chris Roberson – best known for *iZombie* at Vertigo – is, meanwhile, clearly a huge fan, and he's written Doc Savage types before: Camp on *iZombie*, Gladiator Gladstone in *Edison Rex*, and assorted folk in his Bonaventure-Carmody novels. Here he's kicking off his Doc Savage tales in their original '30s milieu, but he plans to slowly bring him into the present day, establishing that while Doc ages extremely slowly – he looks 20-something when we first meet him, and perhaps in his mid-forties for the modern day stuff – his famous assistants, the Fabulous Five, do not, and so will need replacing as the decades wear on. It's an impressive debut, and, crucially, promises yet better tales to come.

Ash And The Army Of Darkness is somewhat less successful, the dark, sparse, occasionally very striking art reminiscent of a less polished Jae Lee. There's little to the plot so far, beyond endless predictable fighting interspersed with equally expected quips – yes, it does seem a little churlish complaining about this in an Ash comic – and only Sheila, a female Arthurian knight, manages to keep the interest levels up.

In effect, this is a continuation of the long-moribund *Evil Dead* series of films, kicking off where the last one – *Army Of Darkness*, in which a typically hapless Ash got zapped back to 1300 AD – left off. That adventure had ended with Ash returned to the present day, a lowly worker at an S-Max store, faced, in the final scene, with a female customer possessed by a demon, and the comic reprises that moment then runs with it. Soon Ash is whisked back to the fantasy medieval period, with all its visual potential and fish-out-of-water, *Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court* vibe. All the right beats are hit here – the actor-accurate faces particularly – but, without the energy of the films, our tale seems pretty thin.

Ash himself remains a likable hero – this tragic guy who's lost everything and never gets a break, yet is at the same time a potent, determined, and remarkably cheery demon killer – and he deserves better. **Matt Bielby**

> **"*Doc Savage* heaves with references to the original"**


A lush, Tim Burton-esque cityscape.
A call is, finally, unusual. A call that cannot be resisted is unique.
I am curious. There is more to learn.
I cannot resist the call... but I can delay it. I can fight it long enough to ensure that when I leave...
...I am prepared.
GET THIS - ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME THAT SOMETIMES A CIGAR IS JUST A CIGAR?
I SAID, NOW YOU'RE GETTING IT, SIGGY.
IN THIS CASE, A CIGAR THRUST BETWEEN THE LIPS OF A MOIST WET PUMPKIN WITH THE SEEDS SCOOPED OUT, CARVED INTO THE SHAPE OF A FACE AND RAMMED ONTO A HARD, ROUGH RAMPANT WOODEN STICK
IT'S JUST A CIG--
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?
IT CAME FROM THE THRONE ROOM... I HAD BETTER INVESTIGATE
YOU ACTUALLY GOIN' THERE? UNINVITED?
HEZA YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN LOUSH

THE SANDMAN OVERTURE

The eagerly awaited *Sandman* prequel's as good as we'd hoped

WRITER Neil Gaiman
ARTIST JH Williams III
PUBLISHER Vertigo
OUT Now
★★★★★

Surrounded by the loud, vicious, bantering noise of most current comics, *Sandman* is – as ever – a breath of fresh air, not least in its refusal to place violent conflict at the centre of what it does. The original Sandman run lasted 75 issues from '89-'96 and there was hardly a fist-fight in it; since then, fans have had to make do with increasingly luxurious collected versions, and numerous spin-off series many starring Death, Delirium, Lucifer and other key supporting characters.

Neil Gaiman, the writer and creator of this incarnation of the Sandman – an oddball Jack Kirby superhero here reinvented as Morpheus, an anthropomorphic personification of "dreams" and key member of the powerful pantheon called The Endless – has kept himself busy elsewhere over the years since, goodness knows, but now returns to the world that made him. We'd first met his Sandman in a weakened state: the patient captive of an occultist who'd accidentally caught him during WW1. What mysterious conflict had rendered Dream so weak that this was even possible has only ever been hinted at, until now.

The Sandman Overture is a six-issue prequel miniseries, then, and a beautiful one, luxuriating in the incredible art of JH Williams III. During its original run, *Sandman* bounced all over the place visually – dozens of pencillers and inkers were used – but that ends here. It's a fool's errand trying to pick the best comics artist when there are so many great ones working, but damn, if there's a more handsome title out there right now, I've not seen it. Williams is a versatile, inventive draftsman, and he's never had a place to show off quite like he does here.

In the first issue alone we get entire spreads that appear like folios from some huge book, or as panels in a portcullis, or as individual teeth in a leering mouth. We flicker from ink washes to raw pencils to fully-painted lushness as the story bounces on, finally climaxing at an amazing gatefold four-page spread that's quite the equal of Steranko's famous one in *Agent Of SHIELD*, though rather more restrained.

Gaiman, meanwhile, places us firmly in 1915 – the only stated hint that this is a prequel, which may baffle those not paying attention – and has his usual fun with the assorted supporting characters who undercut the distant pomposity of our star. There's Merv Pumpkinhead, Death's "rude mechanical" janitor George Portcullis, a nice chap with a most unusual face, and a cheery Death, here dressed more like Mary Poppins on the way to a funeral than her usual garb.

This is a wonderfully told story, beautifully illustrated and laden with intrigue – who, for instance, are all the different Sandmen we meet at the end, one drawn Kirby-style, another like a Gustav Klimt, and a third resembling a giant cat? *Overture* seems sure to be one of 2014's best-loved comics, and perhaps 2015's as well – after all, the second issue is already hugely late.

Matt Bielby

> **"A wonderfully told story, beautifully illustrated"**

ARTHUR SHILLING
Scratchy monochrome art adds to the steampunk-y feel.
ALSO STARRING OR BECKETT IN: THE INNOCENT HEART
CHAPTER 8
INDIGO... WOULD YOU DO THE HONOURS, PLEASE?
OUI CERTAINEMENT.
THANK YOU, HON.
HI GUYS!
SORRY FOR THE ABRUPT TELEPORTATION, BUT WE CAN'T MESS AROUND.
WE NEEDED HELP, AND I WANTED THE BEST.
DIVA, COSTUMES PLEASE
Energetic, fun-packed and full of gags great and small.
RAYGUN SPECIAL

SMALL PRESS ROUND-UP

It's not the size of your wand but how you wave it

ARTHUR SHILLING VS THE NEWLYN NIGHTMARE
WRITER: Chris Nicholls
ARTIST: Rob Cross
OUT: Now
★★★

SPANDEX
WRITER/ARTIST: Martin Eden
OUT: Now
★★★½

RAYGUN ROADS
WRITER: Owen Johnson
ARTIST: Indio
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE GRINNING MASK
WRITER/ARTIST: Ryan Taylor
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE NEW AMAZONS
WRITER/ARTIST: Kult Creations
OUT: Now
★★★

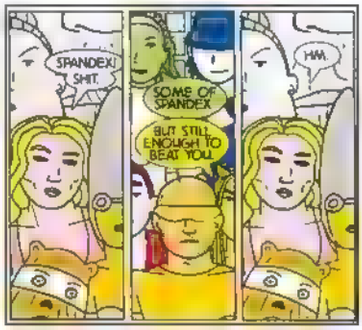
As we all know, the small press is the lifeblood of the comics universe. Without it, many writers and artists wouldn't have a proving ground where they can hone their skills, and we'd all be deprived of a whole heap of below-the-radar comic-y goodness. And so, like the intrepid explorers we almost certainly are, here we go, plunging into the undergrowth to discover exactly what's growing down there at the grass roots.

First up is ***Arthur Shilling Vs The Newlyn Nightmare***, a Kickstarter-funded effort from Cove Entertainment. A ripping, steampunk-y yarn that follows the titular "paranormal adventurer and gentleman engineer" as he attempts to uncover the truth behind a horrific murder, there's lots to like here.

Moody black-and-white artwork and an ambitious split-page narrative mark out writer Chris Nicholls and artist Rob Cross as men with big ideas. The writing is solid and the artwork has a scrappy charm that's reminiscent of Mike Mignola. Things aren't so great in the characterization department – you never really get to know Master Shilling too well – and the split-page approach doesn't always work to the story's advantage. But this is a spirited entertaining effort and a compelling early appearance for a world that we'd like to see much more of.

Martin Eden's LGBT-friendly superhero saga ***Spandex*** is back with a bumper special issue, purportedly the final episode in a story which has seen 50ft lesbians attacking Brighton and much more besides. It feels like an age since we first discovered *Spandex*, and the latest instalment reminds us why we loved it in the first place.

This time round, Brighton's premier team of LGBT super-folk has gone through an Avengers-style line-up change and must take down another insidious threat. As always, Eden



serves up a day-glo story packed with incident. But we found ourselves a little lost in the huge mix of characters and slightly convoluted plotting, and it pulled focus from a bunch of heroes who are usually notable for their big hearts (and filthy minds, obviously).

Still, there's nothing quite like Spandex out there, and it's well worth checking out. Handy hint: don't miss the hilarious yesteryear magazines and films littered throughout.

Next up is ***Raygun Roads***, a creation in the grandest traditions of comix (very much with an x) from Changeling Studios. A highly surreal and irreverent story of music, sex and madness, it's strictly NSFW fare and all the better for it. Writer Owen Johnson and artist Indio have tapped into the very deepest recesses of their psychedelic imaginations with this one, and it's best enjoyed by switching off all critical faculties and strapping in for the trip.

There's not so much a narrative structure as a setlist. It's as if some acid-fried late '60s garage band poured a joint hallucination into a comic, with all the alarming artwork and insane posturing that suggests. The artwork is frequently dazzling, sometimes frightening but uniformly

RAYGUN ROADS
WARNING!! It's a psychedelic blast on all your senses.
JOB CENTRE DRAG-STAR
THE GRINNING MASK
A macabre tale of a village plagued by darkness...
The New Amazons
"Poison Riot"
There are plenty of fist-in-the-air moments for this girl gang.
Kult Directions Returns!
The New Amazons

excellent In fact, the whole thing is presented incredibly beautifully, to the po nt where t s hard to be eve this hasn't come from a arge publisher.

There's no doubt that *Raygun Roads* won't be for everyone – this sort of disorienting freeform trip to the land of the unwell rarely is – but if you d g it, you l *really* dig it

The Grinning Mask by Ryan Taylor is an a together more convent onal story, a though t's not without ts own particular brand of strangeness

The plot centres on drifter Arch ba d s descent into madness and murder, and the unsettling wooden mask he wears to perform his dark deeds. It reads and looks ke a p ece of rural English weirdness, the artwork reminiscent of woodcuts at times, and t s a remarkab y coherent and pol shed piece of storyte ng That Ryan Taylor

“It's as if some acid-fried '60s garage band poured a joint hallucination into a comic”

s a one-man band makes it all doubly mpressive. We actua y read episode three of *The Grinning Mask*, but it's testament to Taylor s ta ent that this ssue stood a one and fe t comp ete.

Fina y, our odyssey through the small press seas brings us to ***The New Amazons*** from Kult Creat ons, an all-female superhero team, with each member themed by country Over the course of this prev ew spec a ed t on, the girls set out to free Pussy Riot and take down Pres dent Putin

There are some good ideas here – using pub c domain characters ke Octobriana, a kick-ass all-lady superhero team, tak ng pot shots at Russia's homosexuality laws – and t's almost al action There's just something s ghtly lacking. The artwork s functional rather than fantast c and lacks a little dynam sm It s well co oured, which helps nject some fe, but all the co ours of the rainbow can't make up for stodgy writing There's a fair bit of that here, with a ot of flat jokes and very itt e n the way of character or plot development

Stil , ts heart is in the right place and that counts for a lot n our eyes There's a fu l graph c novel on the way, and it'l be interest ng to see how this supergirl drama plays out g ven a bit more space and t me to develop **Rob Power**

Please send your small press submissions to Comic Heroes, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW, or digitally to rob.power@futurenet.com

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Plus THE BOXER: BIOGRAPHY OF A SURVIVOR

Numbercruncher Collection

Writer: Si Spurrier

Artist PJ Holden

The irresistibly quirky *Numbercruncher* from one of the hottest comics writers currently working, Si Spurrier, has been one of the highlights of Titan Comics' launch range. If you've been missing out, you can catch up now with this new collected edition of issues #1-4, which has just hit the shelves.

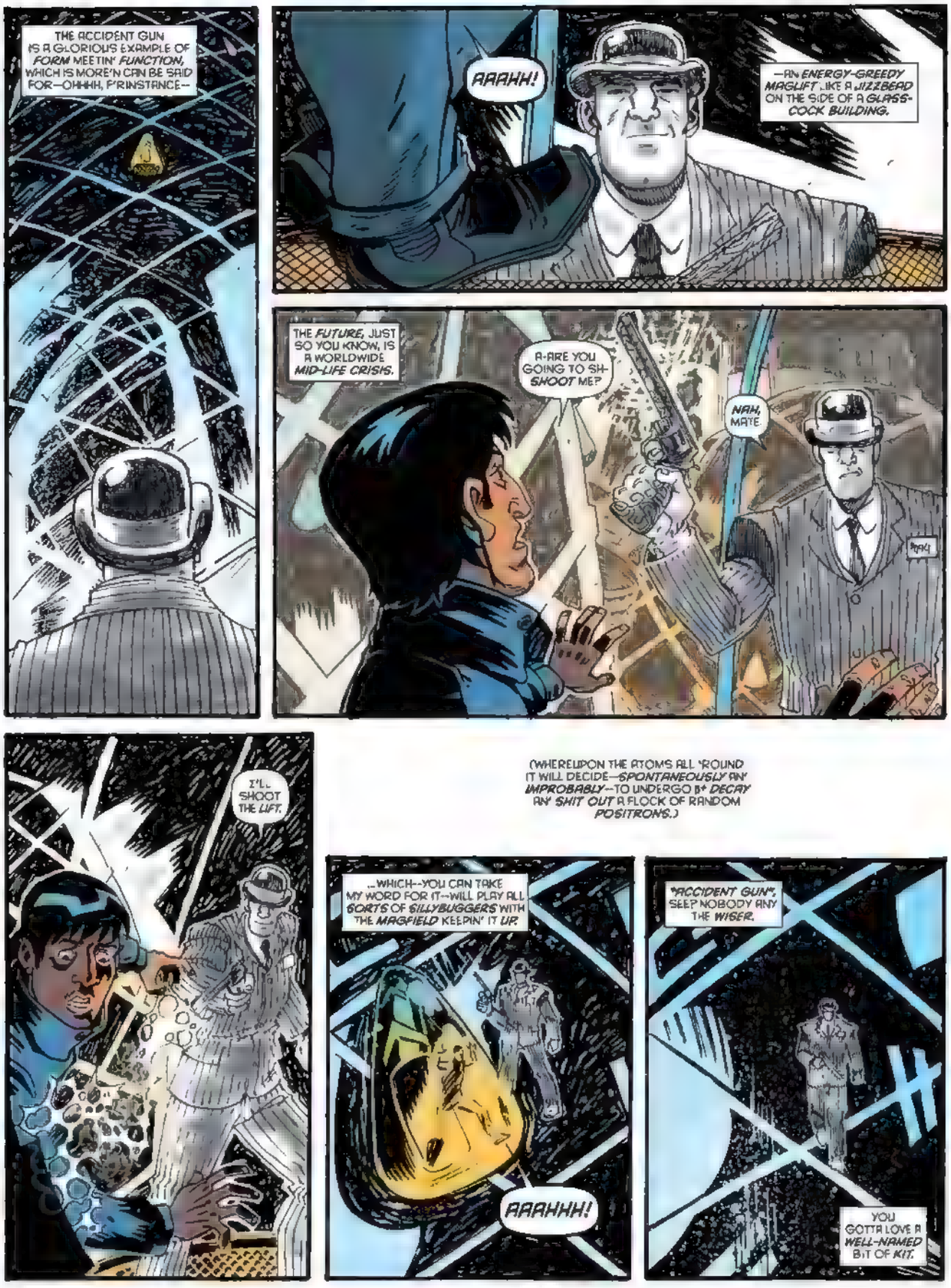
On sale now from Titan Comics

All pages © Titan Comics

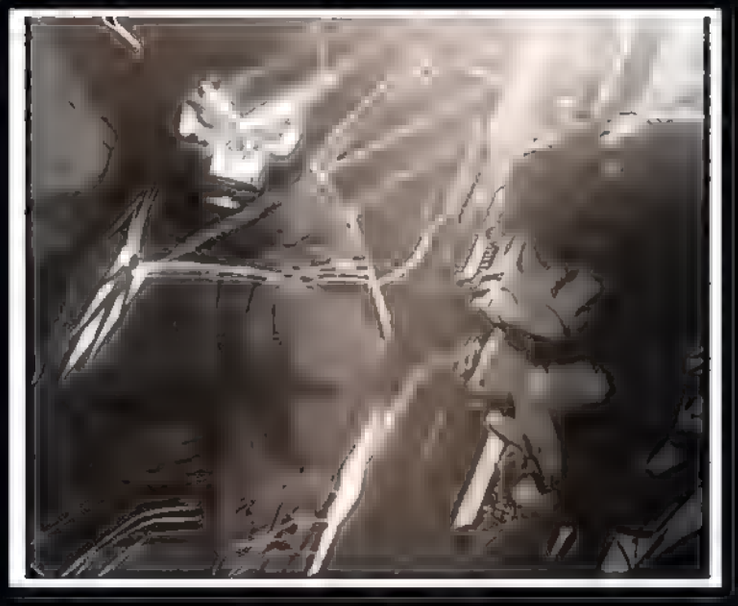
I'VE LED A GOOD LIFE!
I HAVEN'T EXPLOITED ANYONE, O-OR...OR HURT PEOPLE...OR CHEATED.
I NEVER BREATHED A WORD ABOUT RECIRCULATION!
AND?
YOU SAID IF I DIDN'T SIN THEN THE CONTRACT'S NULL AND VOID!
BUT YOU DID SIN, SONNY JIM.
YOU SINNED THE SECOND YOU WAS BORN.
IT WAS THE RETRAINED MEMORIES, DONE IT.
HE INCARNATED WITH AN 'EAD FULL OF LOVE AND LUST, POOR GIT FOCUSED SO TIGHT ON ONE THING— ONE WOMAN—THAT HE DIDN'T PLAY HIS PART IN THE BIGGER EQUATION.
WASN'T A PRODUCTIVE, UNPREDICTABLE, COMPLEX LITTLE NUMBER
OBSESSION, LAD. YOU ROBBED YOURSELF OF CHOICES.
SO?
#4
LET'S NOT MAKE THIS DIFFICULT, EH?

I...
I...
YARR!
rk-ckk
'COURSE, IT'S SORT OF *CUSTOMARY*--THE OLD "LET'S NOT MAKE THIS *DIFFICULT*" LINE.
TRUTH *IS*, I WAS KIND OF *HOPIN'* THIS'D HAPPEN.
ALWAYS *NICE* TO GO OUT WITH A *BANG*.

I BLOODY HATE THE 2030s.
ALL CONTACTLESS 'VERTS AND INSECTOID BLEEDIN' SUSHI. ARCHITECTURAL WANKER'S SHOWING OFF WITH ORGANIC FORMS AND PRICK'S IN ISKINS TALKIN' TOO LOUD.
H-HELP ME!
HE'S TRYING TO KILL ME!
WHO IS?
AAAHH!
THEY CAN'T SEE ME, GENIUS.
ALL THAT TECH, AND NOT THE FIRST FUCKIN' CLUE 'BOUT THE METAMATHICAL DRAMAS UNFOLDIN' AROUND THEM.
LUCKY BEGGARS.
STILL--YOU WANT SOME SWEET GADGETRY TO OGLE? WRAP YER SQUINTS ROUND THIS.
IT'S A GIZMO DESIGNED SOLELY TO COLLAPSE ATOMIC SUPERPOSITIONS— THAT'S "FUCK ABOUT WITH CHANCE" TO YOU AN' ME--AND I HAD TO BEG MY ARSE OFF SO'S THE BOSS D'N'T SHAPE IT LIKE A SODDIN' REMOTE CONTROL.
BEHOLD:
THE ACCIDENT GUN.


THE ACCIDENT GUN IS A GLORIOUS EXAMPLE OF FORM MEETIN' FUNCTION, WHICH IS MORE'N CAN BE SAID FOR—OHHHH, F'RINSTANCE--
AAAHH!
—AN ENERGY-GREEDY MAGLIFT, LIKE A JIZZBEAD ON THE SIDE OF A GLASS-COCK BUILDING.
THE FUTURE, JUST SO YOU KNOW, IS A WORLDWIDE MID-LIFE CRISIS.
A-ARE YOU GOING TO SH-SHOOT ME?
NAH, MATE
I'LL SHOOT THE LIFT.
(WHEREUPON THE ATOMS ALL 'ROUND IT WILL DECIDE—SPONTANEOUSLY AN' IMPROBABLY—TO UNDERGO B+ DECAY AN' SHIT OUT A FLOCK OF RANDOM POSITRONS.)
...WHICH--YOU CAN TAKE MY WORD FOR IT--WILL PLAY ALL SORTS OF SILLYBUGGERS WITH THE MAGFIELD KEEPIN' IT UP.
AAAHHH!
"ACCIDENT GUN", SEEP NOBODY ANY THE WISER.
YOU GOTTA LOVE A WELL-NAMED BIT OF KIT.

NOW THEN.
NO MORE DICKIN' ABOUT, SONNYJIM.
YER CLOGS'RE POPPED, YER FROG'S CROAKED, AND YER MORTAL FUCKIN' COIL HAS BEEN CONSPICUOUSLY SHUFFLED.
YOUR BADGE, OPERATIVE.
NOW CALL IT PARANOIA IF YOU LIKE, BUT WHEN A CLEVER LITTLE SCROTE LIKE THIS DON'T RESPOND TO THE PROSPECT OF METAPHYSICAL SERVITUDE WITH GIBBERING TERROR--AN' IN FACT WEARS A KNUCKLEBAIT BLEEDIN' SMIRK INSTEAD--
--IT'S A FAIR BET THERE'S BOLLOCKERY AFOOT.
AH, CITIZEN THYME--JOLLY GOOD
LET'S GET ON WITH IT, SHALL WE?



Shadowman #14

Writer: Peter Milligan

Artist: Roberto De La Torre

In case you hadn't heard, the inestimable Peter Milligan is now writing one of Valiant's premier titles. As the Shadowman Loa begins to exert its influence in even more unexpected ways, Jack Boniface is quickly coming to terms with the darkness inside him and finding out first-hand just how brutal unchecked power can be.

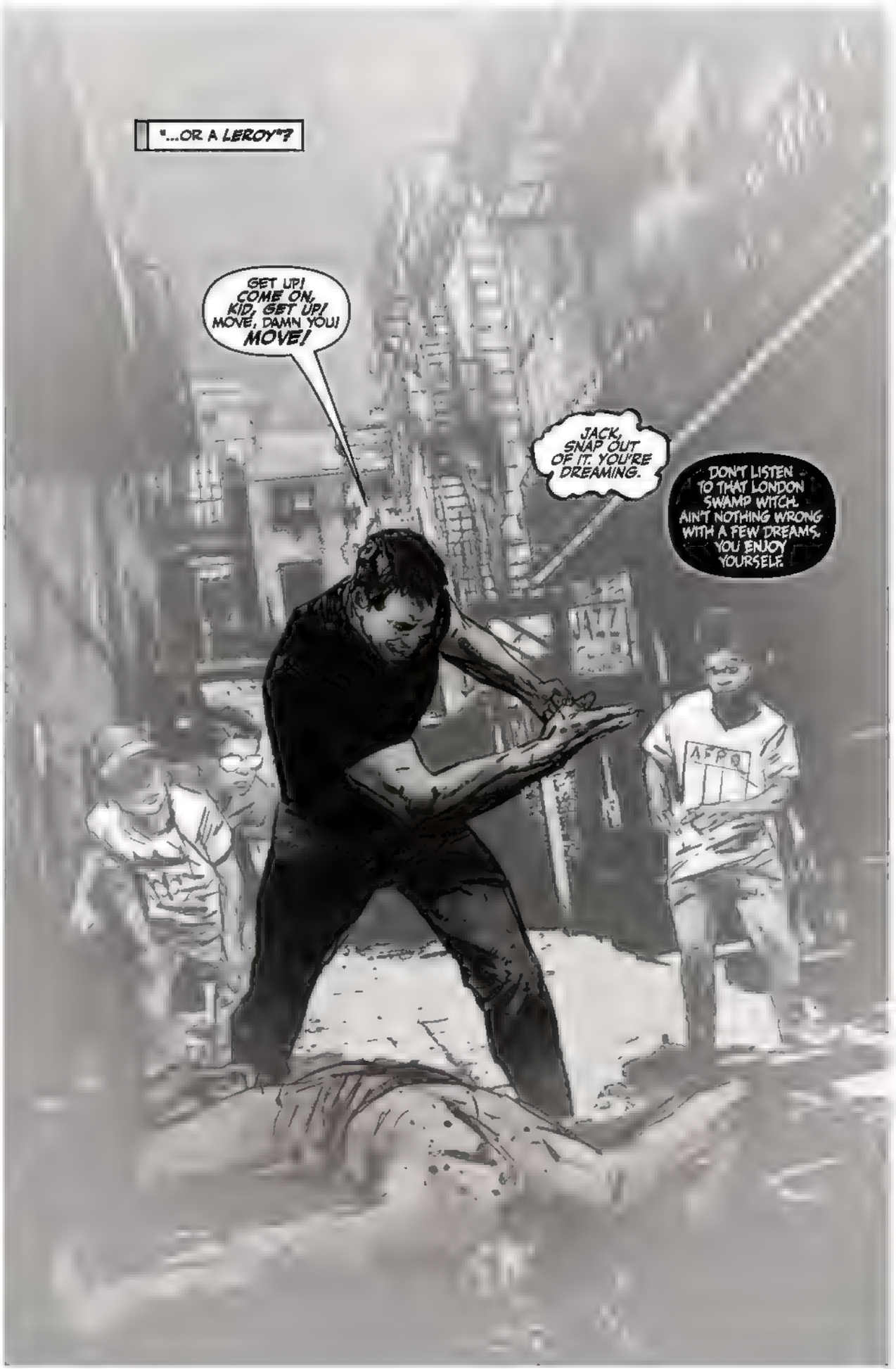
On sale now from Valiant

All pages © Valiant

"THE LWA OR LOA APPEARED LONG AGO IN AFRICA.
"LONGER AGO THAN WE NEED TROUBLE OURSELVES WITH HERE.
"MANY YEARS LATER *SANDRIA*, A YOUNG WOMAN WELL-VERSED IN THE *ART*, CHANNELLED THAT WILD LOA.
"SHE BONDED IT WITH HER LOVER, *MARIUS BONIFACE*.
"HE BECAME THE FIRST *SHADOWMAN*.
"NOW, MARIUS WAS A REMARKABLE INDIVIDUAL.
"HIS SPIRIT AND WILLPOWER HAD BEEN TEMPERED IN THE PITILESS FIRE OF WAR.
"AND HE HAD SOMETHING *ELSE* GOING FOR HIM.
"HE LOVED SANDRIA WITH A *FEROCITY*."

New Orleans.
MAYBE IT WAS ALL THIS THAT GAVE HIM THE STRENGTH...
...THAT GAVE HIM THE CAPACITY TO CONTROL THE ANCIENT AND POWERFUL THING...THAT HAD BONDED WITH HIM.
SO...SO MAYBE IF JACK LOVED SOMEONE... HE'D BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE LOA?
UNLIKELY, ALYSSA. THAT KIND OF LOVE PROBABLY DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE.
AS YOU KNOW, OUR ORGANIZATION WAS FORMED TO ABET FUTURE HOST'S TO RIDE THE WILD LOA BEAST.
BUT ALL THE ABETTING IN THE WORLD...DOESN'T MAKE THE PROCESS INFALLIBLE...
"IN 1902 MARIUS' GRANDSON, LEROY BONIFACE, HAD A SEIZURE IN A HOTEL IN SOUTH RAMPART STREET...
TELL IT LIKE IT IS, ABETTOR HENRY. IT WAS NO HOTEL. IT WAS A BROTHEL.
DIRTY OLD LEROY. WHAT'S THIS GOT TO DO WITH JACK, EARLENE?
LEROY HAD BEEN DRINKING AND WHORING FOR FIVE DAYS STRAIGHT.
MAYBE HE WAS TRYING TO STAY AHEAD OF HIS DEMONS...

"THEY ALL CAUGHT UP WITH HIM THAT NIGHT.
"UNLIKE MARIUS, LEROY LACKED THE INNER STRENGTH TO CONTROL THE LOA.
"THE LOA WENT HUNTING. HUNTING OTHER LOAS.
"IT USED LEROY TO FURTHER ITS OWN MYSTERIOUS AND VIOLENT AGENDA.
"MANY INNOCENT BYSTANDERS WERE KILLED BEFORE THE ABETTORS FOUND LEROY AND NEUTRALIZED HIM."
SINCE THEN GREAT EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE TO MAKE SURE THE HOST IS SUITABLE AND TRAINED.
THIS IS THE PART WHERE YOU TELL ME I SHOULD PUT ANY FEELINGS I HAVE TO ONE SIDE AND HELP YOU CATCH JACK.
MAYBE YOU'LL USE A LITTLE EMOTIONAL BLACKMAIL. SAY IT'S WHAT POOR DEAD DOX WOULD WANT.
YOU KNOW JACK PRETTY WELL, ALYSSA. SO I ASK YOU, WHEN IT COMES TO STRENGTH AND SELF-CONTROL.
WOULD YOU SAY JACK'S A MARIUS...


"...OR A LEROY"?
GET UP! COME ON, KID, GET UP! MOVE, DAMN YOU! MOVE!
JACK, SNAP OUT OF IT. YOU'RE DREAMING.
DON'T LISTEN TO THAT LONDON SWAMP WITCH. AIN'T NOTHING WRONG WITH A FEW DREAMS. YOU ENJOY YOURSELF.
AFRO

Y-YOU... THE MAMBO...?
I'VE BEEN CALLED WORSE. THIS IS A BAD DREAM, JACK. THAT KID YOU BEAT UP... IT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO.
I CAN HELP YOU, JACK. I CAN HELP YOU DEAL WITH YOUR DEMONS.
BUT YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO STOP FIGHTING ME. AND YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO STOP LISTENING TO HER.
M-MAYBE... HE'S RIGHT.
NO, HE'S WRONG.
HE'S A BITTER CRAZY OLD LOA EXILE AND YOU MUST NEVER BELIEVE A WORD HE SAYS.
BUT I... I *SHOULD* BELIEVE *YOU?*
BLOODY RIGHT. AND YOU HAVE TO GET RID OF THAT EXILED LOA. FIND THE HOUNGAN...WHOSE *WANGA* CAN CAST YOU TWO ASUNDER.
TH-THE... *HOUNGAN?*
HE'LL BE ONE OF THE...BROKEN... AND THE SUFFERING. A PRIEST WHO KNOWS NOT HE IS A PRIEST.
...ND THE ONE NEW ORLEANS
I CAN'T HEAR YOU!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? WHERE WILL I FIND HIM?!

The Boxer
Graphic Novel

Writer/Artist: Reinhard Kleist

The true story of holocaust survivor Harry Haft who went on to become a prize fighter, *The Boxer* is written and drawn by highly-acclaimed, award-winning German graphic novelist Reinhard Kleist.

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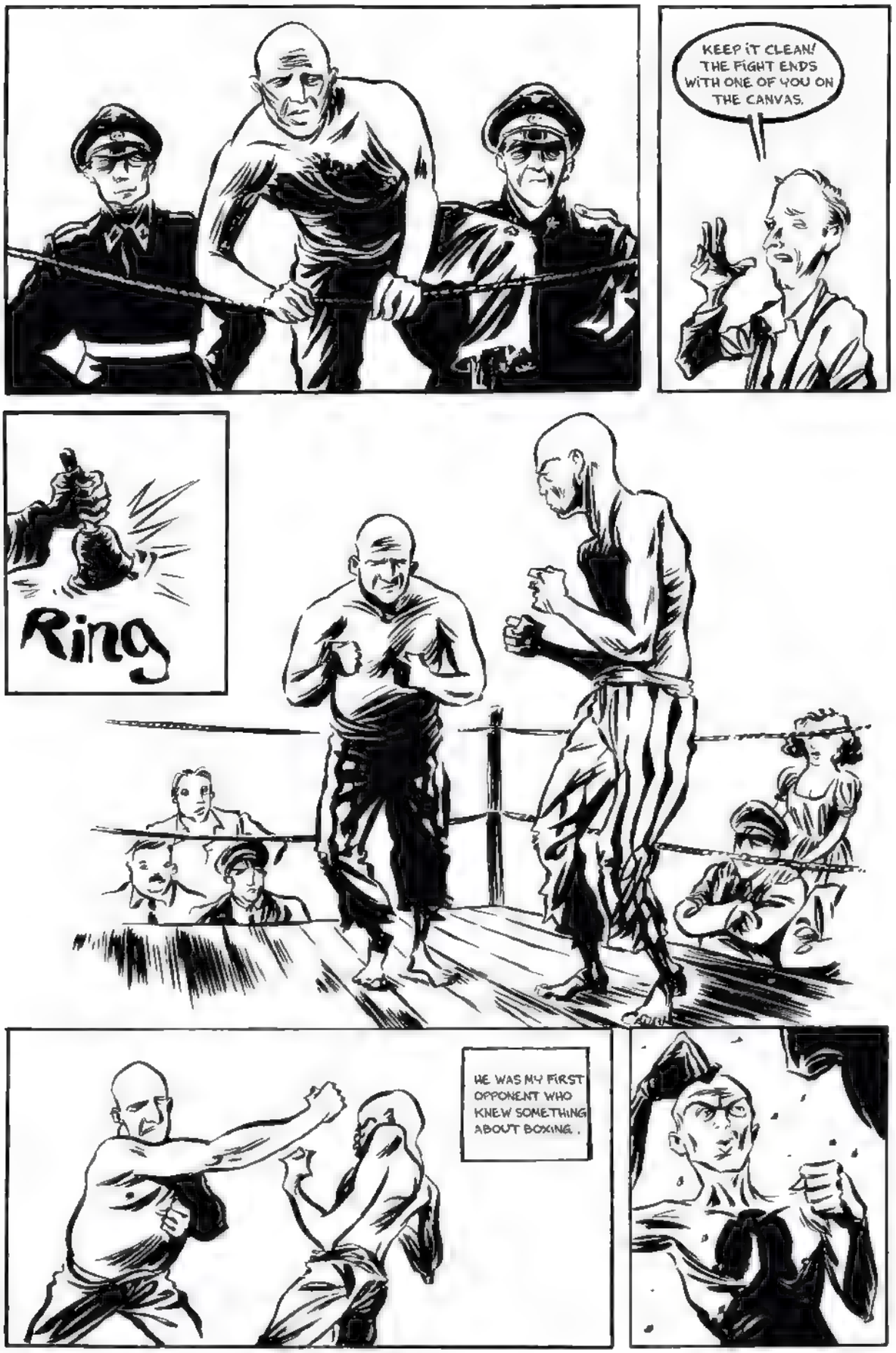
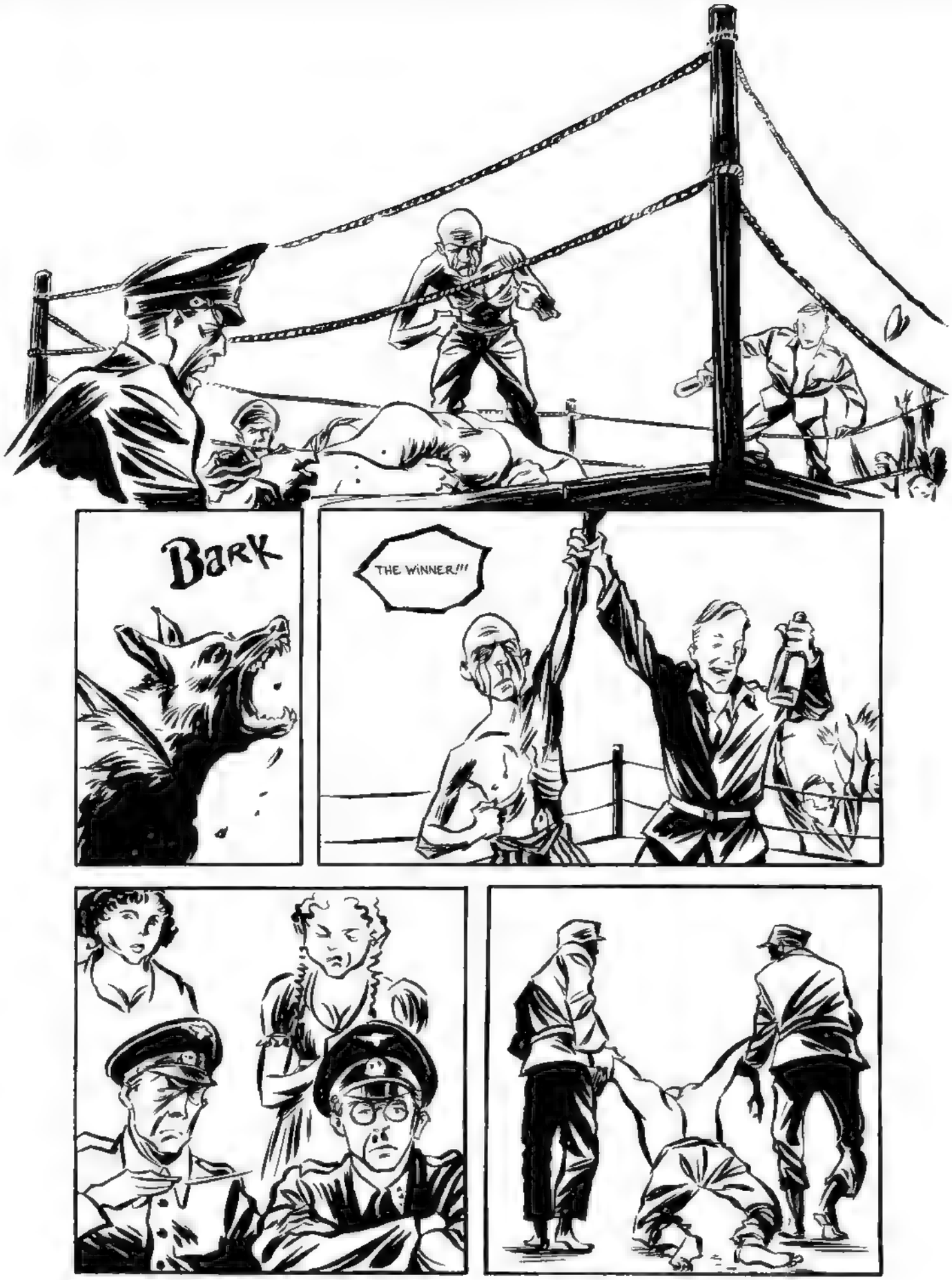

KEEP IT CLEAN! THE FIGHT ENDS WITH ONE OF YOU ON THE CANVAS.
Ring
HE WAS MY FIRST OPPONENT WHO KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT BOXING.

HIT HIM!
COME ON!
FINISH HIM!
BARK
AFTER FOUR OR FIVE ROUNDS, I WAS BLEEDING BADLY FROM DEEP CUTS AROUND THE EYES. I COULD HARDLY SEE ANYTHING.
BUT IN THE SEVENTH, THE FRENCHMAN MADE A MISTAKE...


Bark
THE WINNER!!!

Bang
I NEVER HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THE FRENCHMAN AGAIN.
SO LONG AS I STAYED CLOSE TO SCHNEIDER.
HOW I EVEN HAD A NAME OVER THE BORDER. I THOUGHT NOTHING COULD TOUCH ME...

A BODYGUARD! SO, YOU'VE GONE AND BECOME IMPORTANT, EH? POLITICS? FINANCE? FEMTOTECH?
MM... AND YOU? YOU'RE QUITE THE MAN OF MYSTERY
STILL LIVING OFF DAD'S BOUTIQUE?

Aama
Volume 1

Writer/Artist:
Frederik Peeters

The first volume of Swiss graphic novelist Frederik Peeters's award-winning epic science fiction series, subtitled "A Smell Of Warm Dust". On the last inhabitable planet to be discovered, at a forgotten scientific colony, impossible things are happening.

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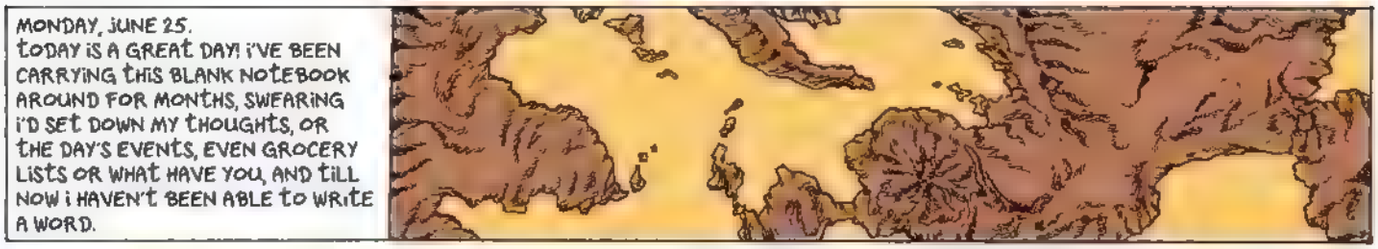
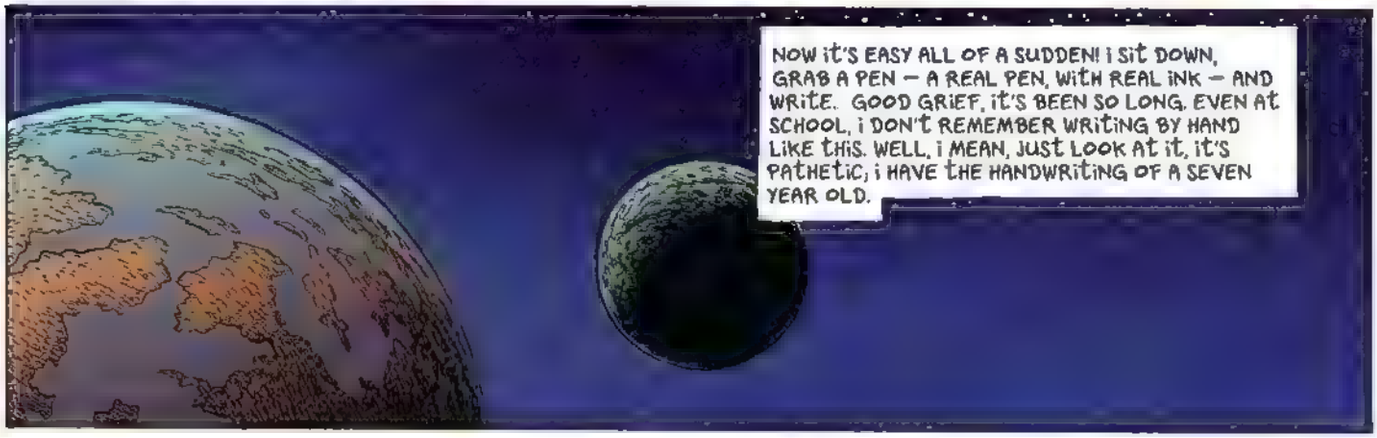
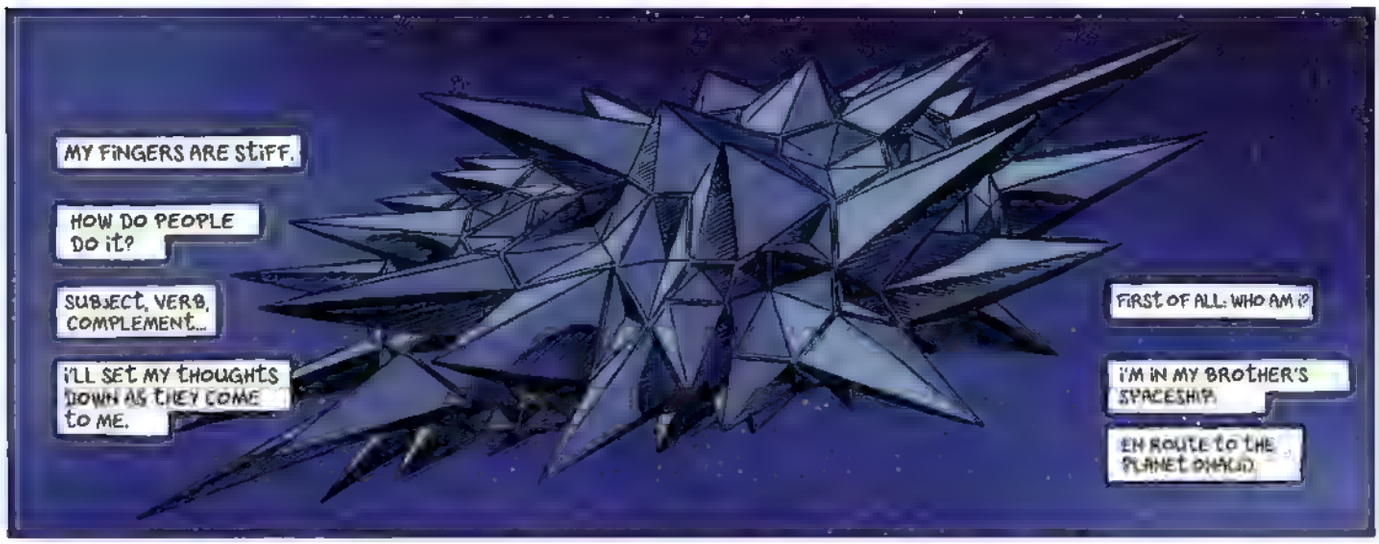
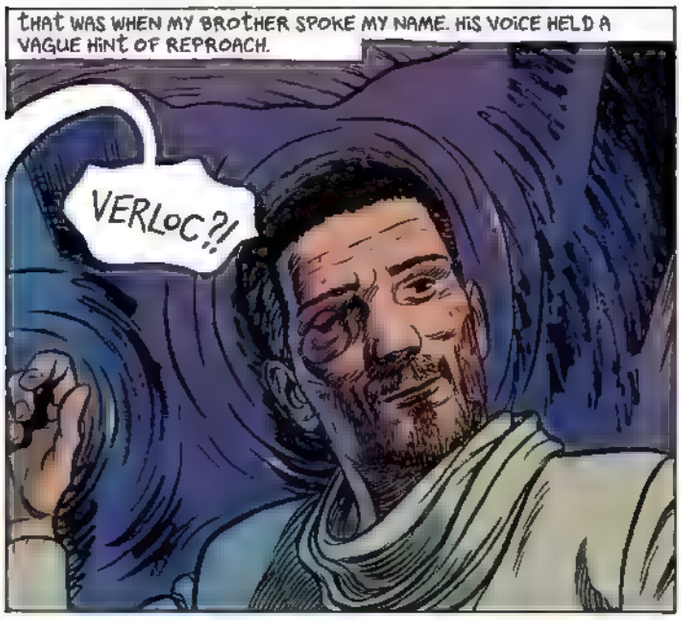

MONDAY, JUNE 25.
TODAY IS A GREAT DAY! I'VE BEEN CARRYING THIS BLANK NOTEBOOK AROUND FOR MONTHS, SWEARING I'D SET DOWN MY THOUGHTS, OR THE DAY'S EVENTS, EVEN GROCERY LISTS OR WHAT HAVE YOU, AND TILL NOW I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO WRITE A WORD.

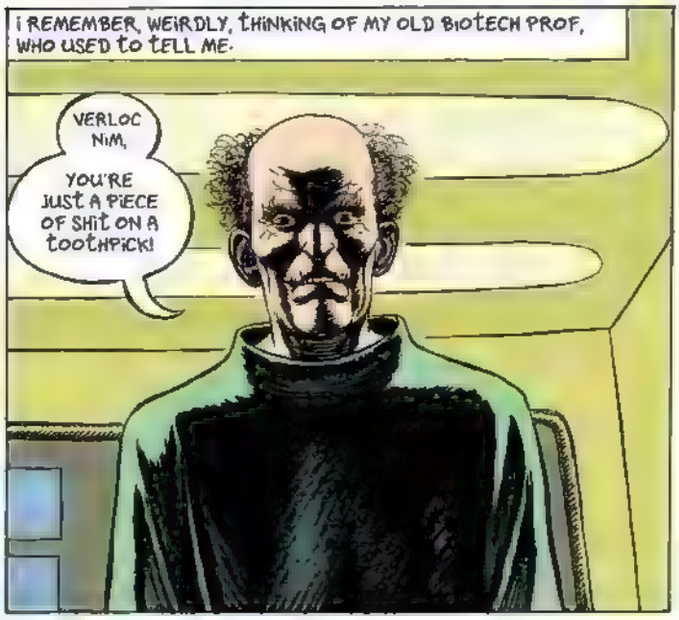

NOW IT'S EASY ALL OF A SUDDEN! I SIT DOWN, GRAB A PEN — A REAL PEN, WITH REAL INK — AND WRITE. GOOD GRIEF, IT'S BEEN SO LONG. EVEN AT SCHOOL, I DON'T REMEMBER WRITING BY HAND LIKE THIS. WELL, I MEAN, JUST LOOK AT IT, IT'S PATHETIC; I HAVE THE HANDWRITING OF A SEVEN YEAR OLD.


MY FINGERS ARE STIFF.
HOW DO PEOPLE DO IT?
SUBJECT, VERB, COMPLEMENT...
I'LL SET MY THOUGHTS DOWN AS THEY COME TO ME.
FIRST OF ALL: WHO AM I?
I'M IN MY BROTHER'S SPACESHIP.
EN ROUTE TO THE PLANET DHAKU.

BEHIND ME IS CHURCHILL. WE JUST TALKED FOR AN HOUR. WELL, I DID MOST OF THE TALKING. IT ALL CAME TUMBLING OUT IN ASTONISHING DISARRAY. I TRIED TO RECALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING UP TO THAT PUDDLE WHERE THEY FOUND ME — HE AND MY BROTHER.

FOR A MOMENT, I SAW MYSELF FROM THE OUTSIDE, BEING PSYCHOANALYZED BY AN APE. AMUSING, TO SAY THE LEAST.
I DON'T KNOW IF I DID THE RIGHT THING, AGREEING TO THIS TRIP. WELL... OF COURSE. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, SOMETHING HAD TO GIVE. STILL, FLEEING TO THE FAR END OF THE GALAXY WON'T EXACTLY HELP ME SEE MY DAUGHTER AGAIN.
NOW...
PERHAPS A BIT OF ORDER.
WHY AM I HERE?
WE SET OFF FROM RADIANT EIGHTEEN HOURS AGO.
RADIANT.
THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST, THEN... THE PUDDLE. LET'S START WITH THE PUDDLE. SHIT, I WAS SO WASTED! I WAS COMING OFF A BENDER AT TAFFY'S SHIA. MY LONGEST EVER. TEN HOURS. MAYBE TWELVE.. EVEN FIFTEEN
FIFTEEN HOURS STEWING IN SHIA, BLOWING MY LAST CREDITS.
MY BLOOD MUST'VE BEEN THICKER THAN MOTOR OIL.
I COULD'VE DIED WITH A SMILE ON MY FACE. COMPLETELY BLISSED OUT, MISTAKING DEATH FOR A BILLBOARD.


that was when my brother spoke my name. his voice held a vague hint of reproach.
VERLOC?!


i remember, weirdly, thinking of my old biotech prof, who used to tell me.
VERLOC NIM, YOU'RE JUST A PIECE OF SHIT ON A TOOTHPICK!

VERLOC?! is that you?
my little brother, whom i hadn't seen for... what, ten years? yeah, since dad died...

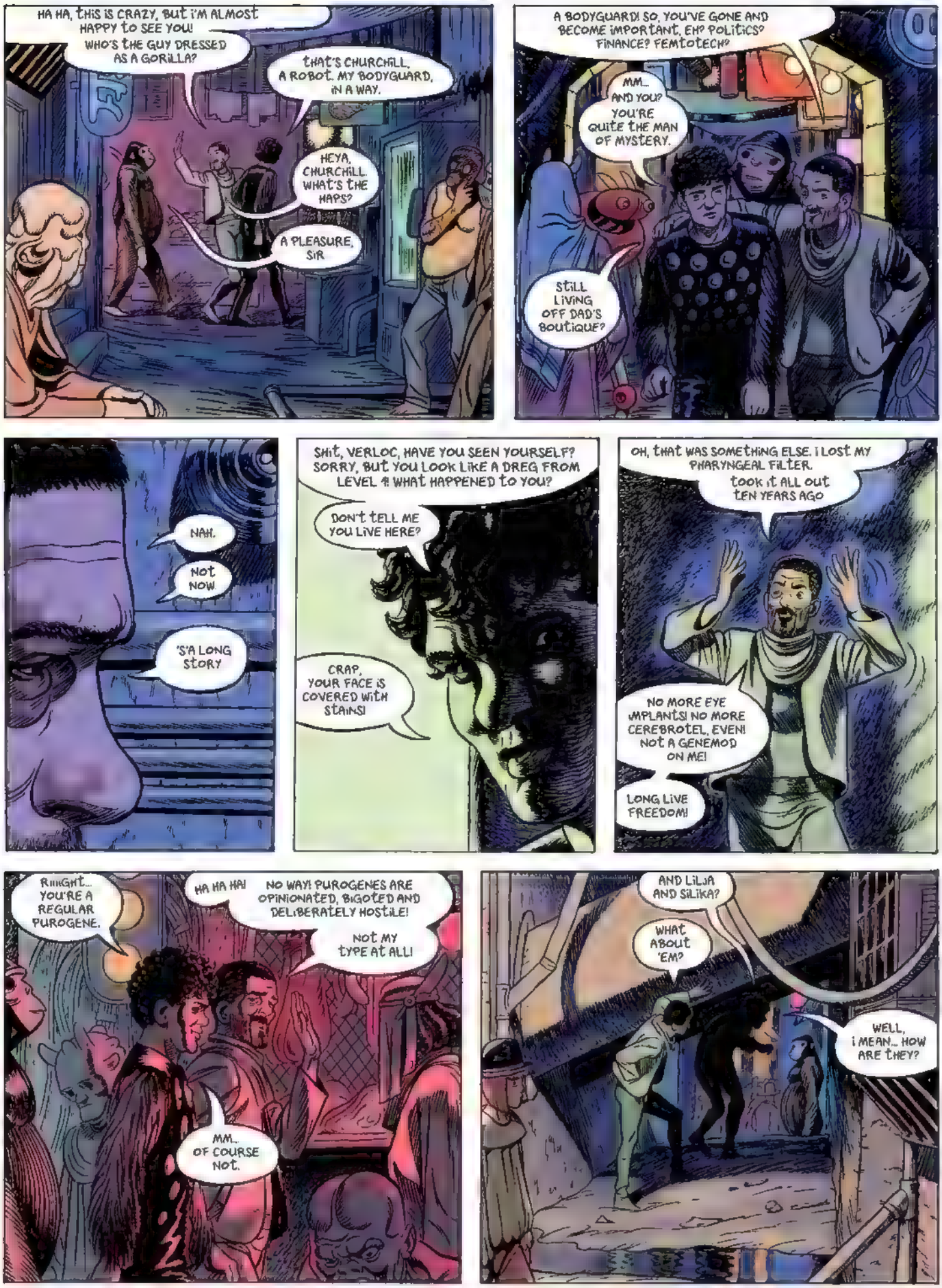
MY LITTLE BROTHER...
...WHO WAS A LITTLE PRICK.

still, i was glad to see him.
JUST LOOK AT YOURSELF! ARE YOU OK?
CONRAD?

CONRAD! WHAT A COINCIDENCE, SEEING YOU HERE!
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING ON LEVEL 1? COME FOR THE WHORES, HAVE YOU?

i CAN SMELL THE SHIA ON YOU FROM A MILE OFF! SHIA AND SHIT!
PLEASANT AS EVER.

SHOULD i GET A DOCTOR?
UH... NO, DEFINITELY NOT. NO DOCTORS, NO POLICE.
C'MON, LET'S WALK.
i HAVE to WALK!


HA HA, THIS IS CRAZY, BUT I'M ALMOST HAPPY TO SEE YOU!
WHO'S THE GUY DRESSED AS A GORILLA?
THAT'S CHURCHILL, A ROBOT. MY BODYGUARD, IN A WAY.
HEYA, CHURCHILL. WHAT'S THE HAPS?
A PLEASURE, SIR
A BODYGUARD! SO, YOU'VE GONE AND BECOME IMPORTANT, EH? POLITICS? FINANCE? FEMTOTECH?
MM... AND YOU? YOU'RE QUITE THE MAN OF MYSTERY.
STILL LIVING OFF DAD'S BOUTIQUE?
NAH.
NOT NOW
'S A LONG STORY
SHIT, VERLOC, HAVE YOU SEEN YOURSELF? SORRY, BUT YOU LOOK LIKE A DREG FROM LEVEL 4! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
DON'T TELL ME YOU LIVE HERE?
CRAP, YOUR FACE IS COVERED WITH STAINS!
OH, THAT WAS SOMETHING ELSE. I LOST MY PHARYNGEAL FILTER. TOOK IT ALL OUT TEN YEARS AGO
NO MORE EYE IMPLANTS! NO MORE CEREBROTEL, EVEN! NOT A GENEMOD ON ME!
LONG LIVE FREEDOM!
RIIIGHT... YOU'RE A REGULAR PUROGENE.
HA HA HA! NO WAY! PUROGENES ARE OPINIONATED, BIGOTED AND DELIBERATELY HOSTILE! NOT MY TYPE AT ALL!
MM... OF COURSE NOT.
AND LILJA AND SILIKA?
WHAT ABOUT 'EM?
WELL, I MEAN... HOW ARE THEY?

HMPH! SILIKA AND I BROKE UP THIRTEEN MONTHS AGO. I HAVE NO RIGHT TO SEE LILIA ANY MORE.
SO WHILE I'D REALLY LIKE TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, I CAN'T.
SO BASICALLY YOU'VE GOT A BLACK EYE, YOUR SKIN'S HALF-MAUVE, AND YOU LOST DAD'S STORE AND YOUR WIFE AND KID.
PLUS I HAVEN'T A DIME TO MY NAME, WHICH SHOULD CERTAINLY TICKLE YOUR INCORRIGIBLE SENSE OF SUPERIORITY WHERE I'M CONCERNED.
YOU'RE IN DEEP SHIT, THEN.
THAT'S IT! I'M IN DEEP SHIT!
THE BLACKEST SHIT!
UP TO MY NECK!
HA HA HA!!
IT'S A TOTAL DISASTER!
BUT YOU STILL HAVEN'T SAID WHAT YOU'RE DOING DOWN HERE, KID BROTHER. YOU, SIR, SMELL OF MONEY AND POWER, AND THAT'S NOT LIKE YOU.
HERE TO SEE A WHORE, RIGHT?
I CAME TO SEE SOMEONE NOT A WHORE
HMPH! I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHERE WE ARE, BUT IF YOU KEEP GOING DOWN THAT WAY, WE'LL REACH THE INHABITED NECROPOLIS, AND I—
WE'RE ALREADY THERE, VERLOC.
AH.

Snowpiercer 1: The Escape

Writer: Jacques Lob

Artist: Jean-Marc Rochette

Titan is releasing the classic, French sci-fi noir in a series of newly-translated English volumes, so that you can be all "well, if you've read the original comic..." when the highly regarded film finally comes out in the UK.

On sale 29 January from Titan Comics

All pages © Titan Comics

SO, WHAT'S ON THE MENU? BISCUITS, I'M USED TO... VEGETABLES... VEGETABLES? YOU STILL HAVE TINS?
THEY'RE TRAIN-GROWN, IN THE GREENHOUSE-CARS.
GREENHOUSE-CARS? YOU GROW THEM?
WELL, YES, SOME CARS ARE STILL EQUIPPED FOR IT. THEY WERE DESIGNED THAT WAY — YOU KNOW, BEFORE...
AND MEAT?
FRESH BABY MOUSE!
RAT, YOU MEAN!
NO, THERE ARE NO RATS HERE, JUST MICE BRED FOR FOOD... WHAT ABOUT YOU? HOW DID YOU MANAGE BACK THERE?
KNOCK KNOCK!
KNOCK KNOCK!
WHAT DOES HE WANT?
LIGHTS OUT!

I KNOW THERE'VE BEEN OTHERS BEFORE ME WHO TRIED TO MOVE UP THROUGH THE TRAIN... HAVE YOU HEARD OF THEM? DO YOU KNOW IF ANY SUCCEEDED?
NO... ASIDE FROM A FEW VAGUE RUMORS – SCARED UP BY THE PANIC THAT FOLLOWED THE 'WILD RUSH'...
YOU MEAN THE *MASSACRE?*
YES, IT WAS AWFUL...WERE YOU THERE?
NO, I WAS FURTHER TOWARDS THE BACK... I'D ALREADY GOTTEN PRETTY WELL BEATEN BY THE TIME WE BOARDED. DO YOU REMEMBER THE DEPARTURE...?
DO I *REMEMBER...?*

THE STORMING OF THE CARRIAGES... THE SCREAMS STRANGELY MUTED IN THE WINTRY AIR, AS IF PETRIFIED BY THE COLD...
THE FACES HIDEOUSLY CONTORTED BY PANIC, FURY, AND DESPAIR...
I WAS STILL A CHILD... BUT HOW COULD I FORGET?
AND YET, I WAS LUCKY... LUCKY THAT I WASN'T SEPARATED FROM MY FAMILY, AND THAT WE ENDED UP -- I'M NOT SURE HOW; CARRIED BY THE CROWD? -- IN A CARRIAGE WHERE WE COULD STAY.
I COULDN'T REACH THE FIRST-CLASS SECTION... OR EVEN THE SECOND-CLASS CARRIAGES.
I ALMOST MISSED THE REST -- I WOULD'VE BEEN STRANDED ON THE PLATFORM. IN THE END, I MANAGED TO GET INTO THE VERY LAST CAR OF THE TAIL... BUT ONLY JUST.
THEY HADN'T STOCKED THOSE CARRIAGES FOR US -- HADN'T PACKED THEM WITH SUPPLIES, TINS AND BISCUITS ON *OUR* ACCOUNT -- BUT WE MADE THE MOST OF THEM ANYWAY! WE EVEN HAD CATTLE... WE HAD *PLENTY* -- LIFE WAS SWEET.
...BUT THEN *FOOD* B-B-BECAME SCARCE...

AREN'T YOU *TIRED...?*
NO. HOW ABOUT YOU?

OH!

HEH HEH *HEH* HEH *HEH!*

FUCKING IDIOTS!
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World's Finest

In conversation with the comic book legends...

Pablo Marcos

Muscle man

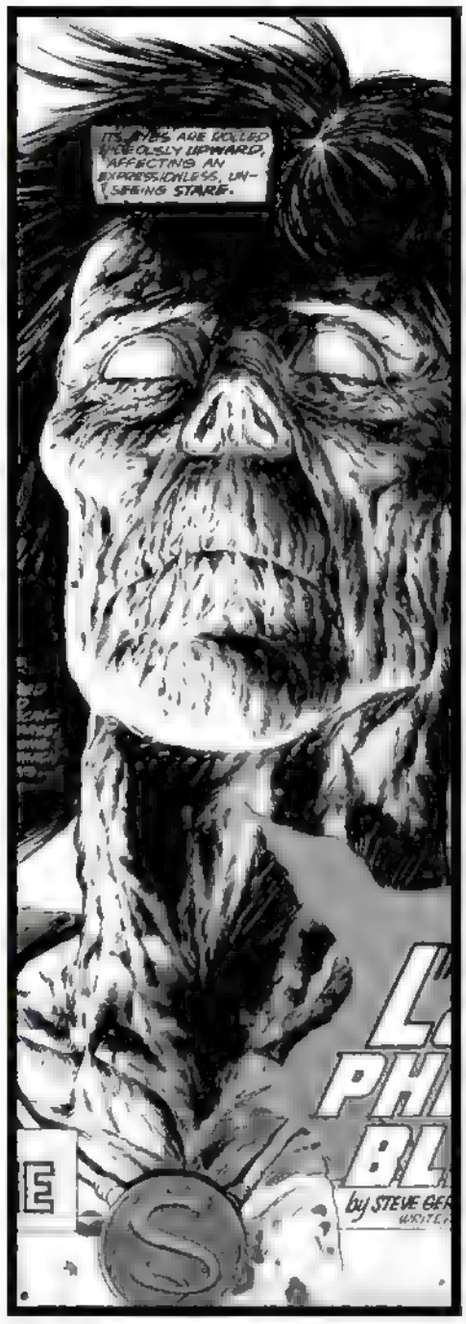
Words by David Currie

"I could not imagine my life without my art"

During the '70s, Marvel comics began to expand its line of publications dramatically, in a bold – and ultimately effective – attempt to gain dominance of the comic book industry.

As well as its ever-increasing roster of colour comics, a line of black-and-white, magazine-format titles found rapid success and spawned a multitude of additions month after month.

It started tentatively with *Savage Tales*, *Dracula Lives* and *Savage Sword Of Conan* but soon grew to monster proportions with titles as diverse as *Planet Of The Apes*, *Deadly Hands Of Kung Fu*, *Monsters Unleashed*, *Vampire Tales*,



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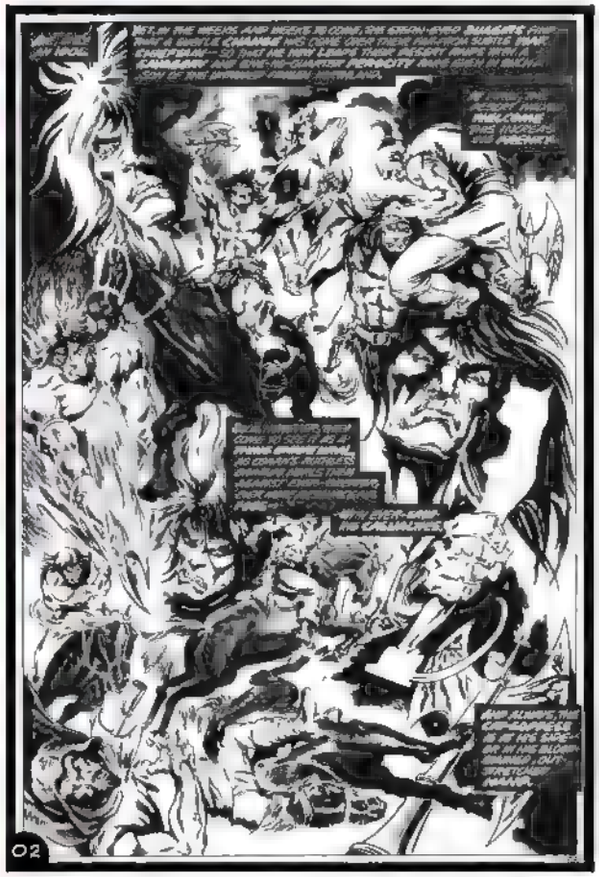
01 *Savage Tales* #3, Feb 1973

A Marcos and John Romita cover Amongst Marcos's earliest interior work were inks on Barry Smith's *Conan* adaptation "Red Nails"

02 *The Savage Sword Of Conan* #9, Dec 1975

"The Curse Of The Cat-Goddess" by Marcos and Roy Thomas, the pair worked together many times on *Conan* and *Red Sonja*.



Haunt Of Horror, *Marvel Preview*, *Monsters Of The Movies* and *Tales Of The Zombie*, to name just a few.

This magazine-format comic book was something close to Stan Lee's heart; he'd previously tried it as early as 1968 with *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #1. Stan figured that if Marvel's comics were racked alongside magazines in outlets, they would attract a wider audience. *Spectacular Spider-Man* was a bold experiment; a black-and-white magazine, twice the size (and price) of a regular comic, with a painted cover and, along with the usual Marvel costumed slug-fests, a more adult-themed storyline (they talked about politics a lot). The second issue appeared, but in full colour and proclaiming the return of the Green Goblin and the experiment wrapped up after that having failed in its bid to find a whole new demographic of reader.

During the '70s magazine explosion period, however, Marvel found the sudden need to employ artists adept at intricate linework that would shine within the monochromatic format and appear sophisticated enough to appeal to a slightly older audience, thereby justifying the $1 price tag (at a time when colour comics were 20 cents).

Marvel also wanted artists who were incredibly quick and willing to work at a lower page rate than their colour comic counterparts. To fill that need, the Marvel editors looked, for the first time, beyond US shores to recruit talented artists from the Philippines and South America.

Pablo Marcos was one such creative and his art – filled with muscular heroes, fabulous landscapes and swamp-dwelling monsters – initially found a perfect home in Marvel's black-and-white line.

To these books, Pablo brought an illustrative quality, steeped with exoticism and dark drama and his signature characters included Conan the Barbarian and Simon Garth, the Zombie from *Tales Of The Zombie*. But he was prolific and his work was regularly seen in a wide range of Marvel titles and eventually migrated from the more fantasy-based black-and-white magazines to the hero-centric colour comics where he either pencilled or inked titles like *Avengers* and *Thor*.

Readers of Marvel's '70s UK weekly comics would have seen Pablo's work on more than 100 covers produced for the line and he remained a commanding presence in comics for both Marvel and DC throughout the '70s and '80s.

Comic Heroes spoke to Pablo about his life, career, barbarians in the hills and Zombies in the swamps...

Comic Heroes: Can you tell us a little of your early years? What was it like growing up in '40s Peru?

Pablo Marcos: "I was born in 1937 in a quaint farming village, called Laran, which belongs to the town of Chincha in Ica Peru When I was four years old my family moved to Lima, but during vacations I returned to Chincha to visit with my grandfather, with whom I was very close I have very little recollection of my early childhood, but I do remember the poverty we had to live in For a span of my life we lived in a petroleum truck garage. I also recall the many hours I spent with my neighbours playing soccer with a ball that was made of old socks!"

CH: Did you draw from an early age, despite the poverty?

PM: "As far as I can recall, I always loved to draw My family tells me that when I was three I drew a story of cowboys vs Indians with stick figures, and round circles for their heads Years later, I was asked by my teachers to draw maps, bodies (for anatomy lessons) and plants to assist the professors in their lessons

"Back in those days there were very few comics or magazines from the US available it was mostly Disney titles. We also received magazines from Argentina, such as *El Peneca* My brother Manuel and I would save our pennies to be able to rent the magazine which we absorbed quickly we were fascinated with the art and the way the scripts played out While I was in school, my art professor Juan Rivera would allot me books and Italian magazines, which had a huge impact on me I enjoyed *Domenica del Corriere*, which was an illustrated news magazine that came out weekly I also liked *Domenica del Piccolo*, which was a comic"

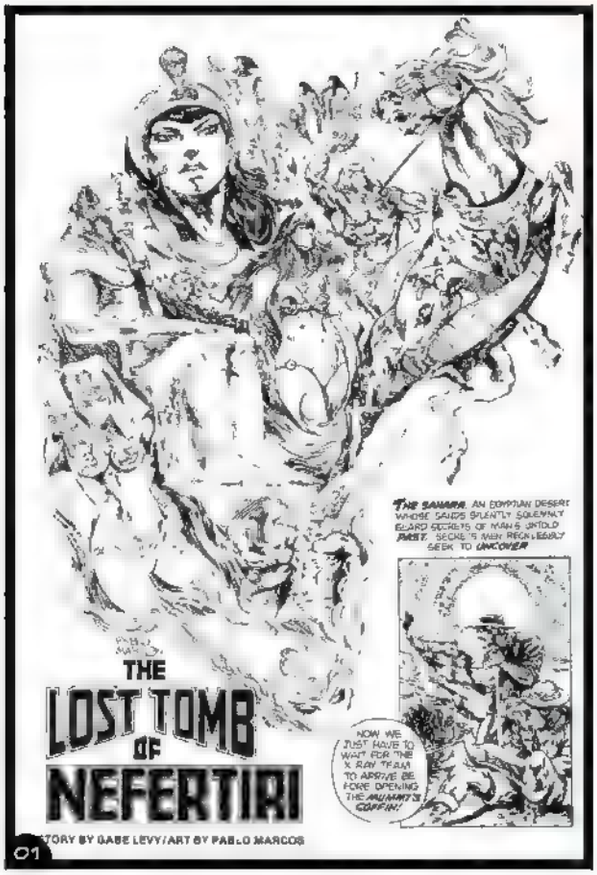
CH: As times were tough, how did your family feel about your artistic ambitions? Were they supportive when you said you wanted to pursue a career as an artist?

PM "I don't think my family realised that I preferred art, because I was in school and it just seemed like I liked to draw, especially ,,

01 *Devilina* #1, 1975
This tale of a reanimated mummy appeared in Atlas/Seaboard's B&W magazine.

02 *The Brute* #1, Feb 1975
The Brute was a blue Hulk-alike, but a tad more vicious, another Atlas/Seaboard title.

03 *James Bond 007*, 1960s
One of the many comic strips Marcos produced for the Peruvian press during the '60s.



AND THEN SUDDENLY WITHOUT WARNING IT IS UPON THEM! A HIDEOUS THING FROM OUT OF THE DARKNESS, A NIGHTMARISH BEAST FROM THE VERY DAWN OF TIME. POOR LITTLE TIMMY NEVER HAS A CHANCE FOR A HARSH FATE HAS DECREED THAT HE IS TO BECOME THE FIRST OF THE MANY MANGLED VICTIMS ON THIS UNFORGETTABLE
NIGHT OF THE BRUTE!
GROWWRRRP!
GOOD CHOKE LORD!
BEYAH!
HELP!
SCRIPT BY MIKE FLEISHER
PENCILED BY MIKE SEKOWSKY
INKED BY PABLO MARCOS
EDITED BY JEFF KOVIN
02

when it came to my homework assignments where I did a lot of illustrations. Later on, while still a student, I joined a national newspaper and was assigned to illustrate political caricatures. Many days I would get home late, and I still had to go to school early in the morning. This went on for a long time. My parents thought that I had taken the job while I was in school just to make some money. While I was finishing up High School, my father advised me to do whatever possible to be able to attend the university. He also pointed out that a career as an artist is not a guarantee of success. So I followed his advice and studied economics, but I could not imagine my life without my art."

CH: So how did you avoid becoming Pablo Marcos the accountant?
PM: "Well, I fell in love and got married very young. While finishing up my education, I became a father. I realised that I was able to make more money in a few days as an illustrator than I could as an accountant in a month. I enjoyed working at the newspaper as a journalistic illustrator, and covering sporting events. So this is when I decided to stay in my artistic career, since it was a much more lucrative career path and also personally rewarding."

ÉL TENÍA QUE VIAJAR EN EL AVIÓN CON LOS BOMBAS SUPONGAMOS QUE LO VIO? ¿QUÉ HACÍA DERVAL EN EL SANATORIO
NADA. ESTARÁ MUERTO.
03

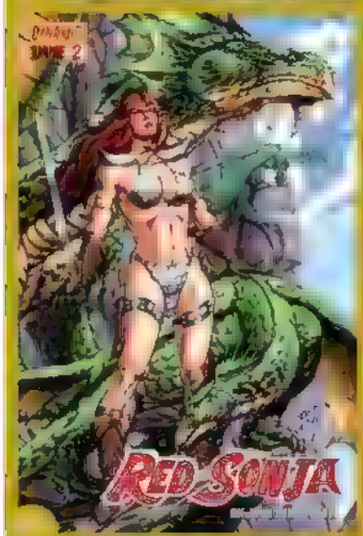
CH: At what point did you gravitate towards comics as a medium for your art?
PM: "I very quickly realised that I had the ability to do visual narratives. Before I left Peru I did historical narrations about the Incas and other Pre-Colombian cultures. Then while in Mexico I worked for a few other magazines such as *Vidas Illustres* (*Illustrious Lives*), *Leyendas de America* (*American Legends*) and *Epopeyas*. These were among some of the large magazines I illustrated for, while turning out 32 pages within a month. In 1967, I had the opportunity to illustrate the death of Che Guevera. But when I first arrived in the US I realised that my career would be in the comic book industry. I was immediately accepted and I began working for some of the largest firms, including Marvel."

CH: Before that, didn't you work for some time on a James Bond comic strip for a Peruvian newspaper in the '60s?
PM: "Yes, for about two years. I took references for Bond and the UK directly from the movies. I would watch the same movie over and over again while taking notes. I had help from a photographer who captured the scenes that interested me the most."

CH: In 1970, you made the move from Peru to New Jersey. Of course, at that time it was mainly artists who lived in New York who got the assignments, which must have helped you make that decision. Was this an exciting time for you?
PM: "We did not live in New Jersey (near Newark called Ivey Hill) for very long before we were able to move to New York itself. Of course, New York impressed me very much, yet I »

"AND SO, WITH THE CONNIVANCE OF THE QUEEN, LITTLE ROLAND, THE RIGHTFUL HEIR TO THE THRONE WAS HANDED OVER TO A PALACE STABLE-MAN WITH INSTRUC-TIONS TO DROWN HIM IN A NEARBY LAKE...

"BUT THE OLD STABLEMAN TOOK PITY ON THE INFANT. HE WRAPPED HIM IN A BLANKET AND CARRIED HIM AWAY TO A DISTANT LAND BEYOND THE GREAT CRATER WHERE NOTH-ING GROWS...
"AND THEN ABANDONED HIM ON A SNOWY MOUNTAINTOP IN THE FAINT HOPE THAT SOMEHOW HE MIGHT SURVIVE
WH-WHY YOUR STO SOUNDS MORE LIKE FAIRY-TALE THAN--
EVERY WO OF IT IS TR MILADY! YO BROTHER W MAGNIFICEN INFANT! I D NOT KNOW HE CAME T WEAR HIS JAW!
BUT I CAN AS YOU THAT HE IS BROTHER BY BL AND THE RIGHTF RULER OF TH KINGDOM



Pablo Marcos | Major Works

01 EARLY PERUVIAN WORK | 1950-1970
Marcos first came to prominence in his native Peru, initially as a political cartoonist then through newspaper comic strips like *James Bond 007*.

02 CREEPY, EERIE, NIGHTMARE, PSYCHO ET AL | 1971-1975
His first American success was with black-and-white horror shorts for *Creepy* and *Eerie*, then dozens more for rival Skywald.

03 EARLY MARVEL WORK | 1973-74
At Marvel UK he contributed dozens of covers to British weeklies like *Dracula Lives*, *The Mighty World Of Marvel* and *Planet Of The Apes*.

04 TALES OF THE ZOMBIE | 1973-1975
The Simon Garth "Zombie" character was the super-strong, virtually mindless (yet somehow noble) victim of voodoo cult machinations.

05 IRONJAW | 1975
At the shortlived Atlas/Seaboard, Marcos contributed interior art to the sword-and-sorcery book *Ironjaw* and the Hulk-like *The Brute*.

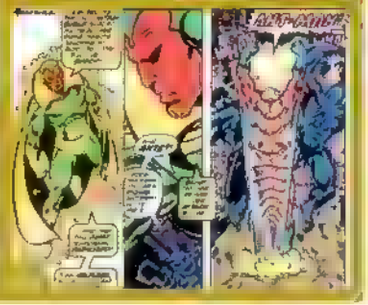
06 CONAN AND KULL | 1975-1988
Marcos spent much of the '80s inking the *Conan The Barbarian* colour comics and the black-and-white *Savage Sword Of Conan*.

07 DC WORK | 1976-1993
Marcos contributed fill-in issues to books like *Kamandi* and *Teen Titans*, plus a run of *Man-Bat* stories in *Detective Comics* and his own title.

08 MARVEL COLOUR COMICS | 1976-1991
Though most of his Marvel work was for black-and-white horror and sword-and-sorcery titles, he regularly contributed to the colour line too, including issues of *The Mighty Thor*, *Marvel Two-in-One*, *The Avengers* and *Dracula Lives*.

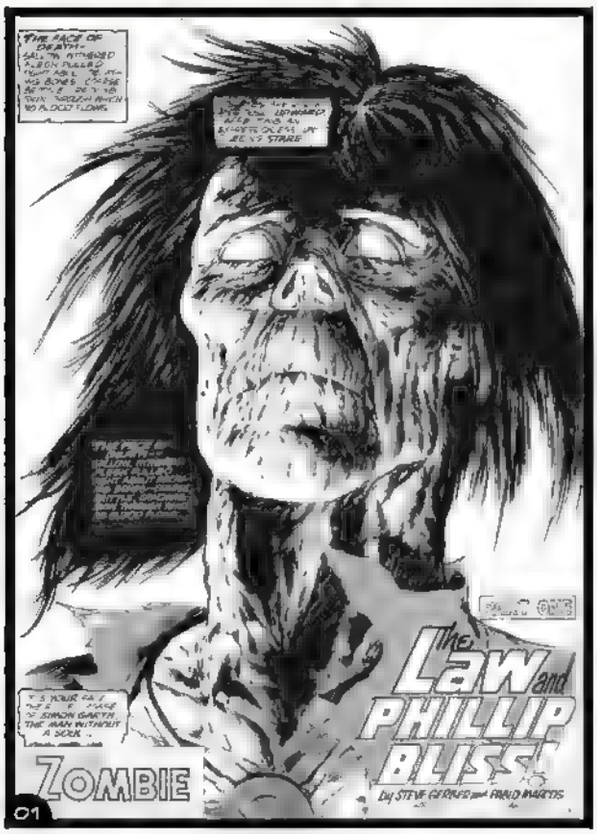
09 CLASSIC NOVEL ADAPTATIONS | 1977-2000
In the late '70s Marcos inked adaptations of *Kidnapped* and *The Prisoner Of Zenda* for the Marvel Classic Comics line.

10 STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION | 1990-94
Marcos enjoyed lengthy stints pencilling and inking this DC spin-off.



01-3 *Tales Of The Zombie*, 1973-75

Simon Garth, aka the Zombie, was the star of this black-and-white horror comic from Marvel, with Marcos contributing nearly all of the art from scripts by Steve Gerber. It lasted fewer than a dozen issues, but is much admired and well-remembered; Garth has been revived a handful of times since.



01

02

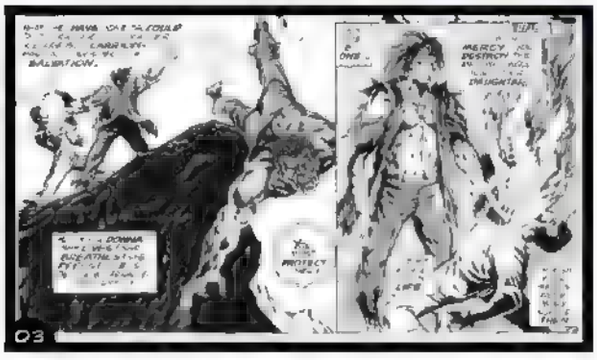
was very worried about finding regular work there, since I was there with my whole family – four children and a wife. It was terrifying to think about not being able to find work in a city like New York."

CH: But luckily you found open doors at Warren Publishing to begin with...

PM: "I had read a few magazines that Warren Publishing were putting out, horror titles like *Eerie* and *Creepy*. I loved them and I was determined to go to New York and show them some of my work. I came to New York thinking that we were just on vacation, but my wife Norma had orchestrated something different. She was intent on moving to New York, she had always believed in me and was dedicated to my success. Warren publisher Jim Warren loved my work and immediately gave me a script to work on. This was the beginning of my career in the comic book industry.

"I am so thankful to my first wife, Norma, and Jim Warren for this life amongst paper, pencil, ink, and those many scripts with a large variety of stories passing energetically by my drawing table. While I was in New York I had the benefit of three good friends: Sol Brodsky, Boris Vallejo and Allen Hewetson."

> ***I don't comprehend why zombies are so popular these days***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CH: Wasn't Boris Vallejo your mentor during those early days in the comic industry?

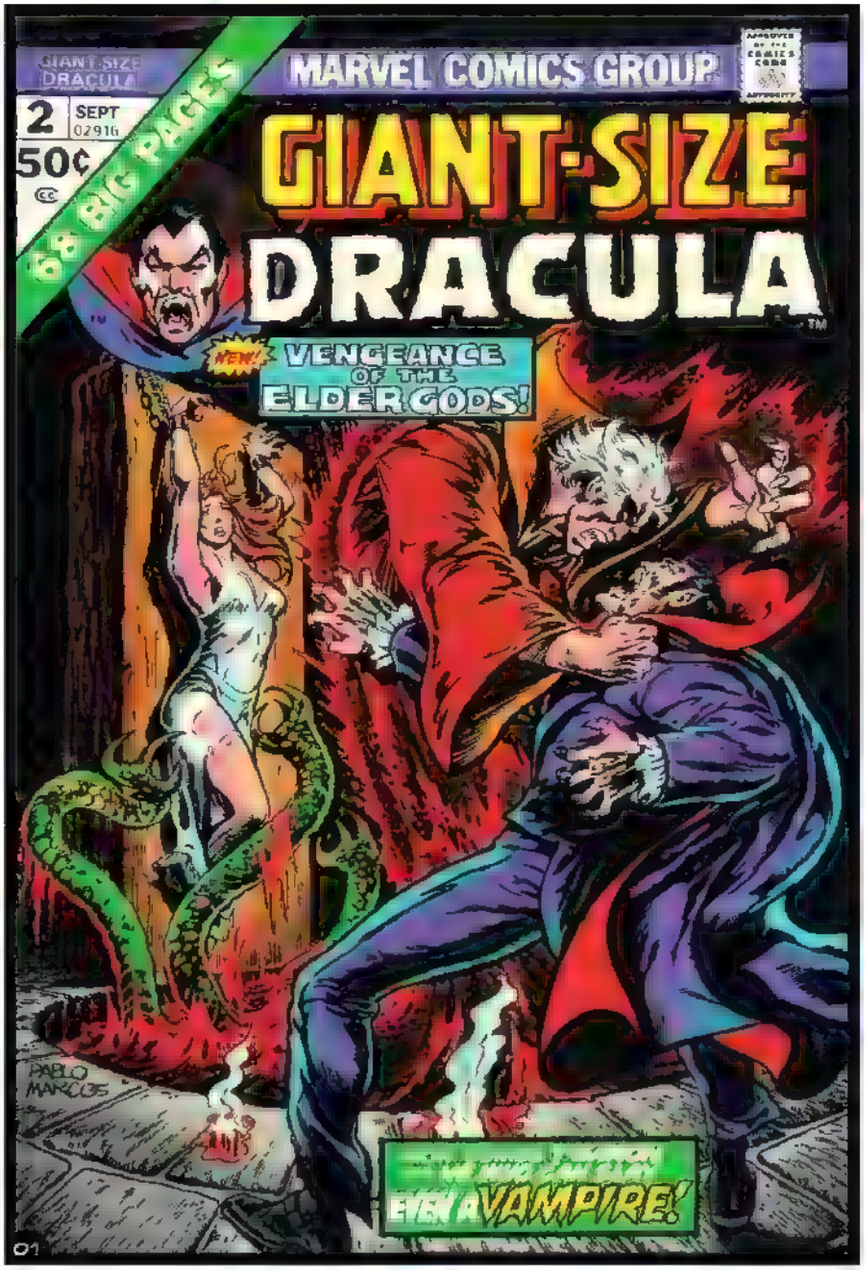
PM: "Yes. Boris was always a big help in many ways. He helped me adjust to my new home in New York, and helped me with translations and editors, and really guided me on how not to fail in this industry. We became really good friends and he was always there for me, especially when my wife was very ill and eventually passed away in 1985. He was even there when I got married to my (God sent) present wife Myriam in 1988. Boris and I used to work together and really understood one another, but I have not been able to keep in touch with him over the years since he lives in the US and I now reside in Colombia."

CH: How did you first meet Sol Brodsky?

PM: "When I went to work for Skywald Publishing, I was interviewed by Israel Waldman, the owner of the company who then introduced Sol Brodsky to me. I was very lucky because we all hit it off right from the start. Sol helped me in establishing myself into the company."

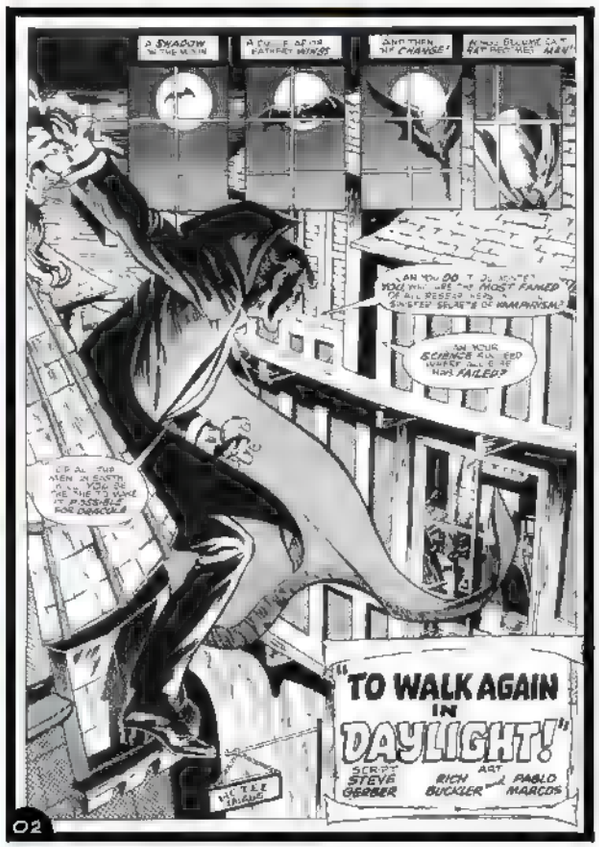
CH: Wasn't it Sol who got you your first work at Marvel?

PM: "Yes. When Sol left Skywald and went to Marvel, he promised me he would help me find work at this prestigious company. At the time, he was the assistant to Stan Lee. I can't quite recall which work I did for them at first. But I do remember how well it was accepted. I constantly saw Stan Lee at the offices and he would often assign me different cover assignments. Stan was very active, sociable, guiding us, doing quick sketches so that he could



01 ***Giant-Size Dracula* #2, Sept 1974**
Marcos's first colour comic book work in the United States.

02 ***Dracula Lives* #1, Aug 1973**
A Steve Gerber-scripted tale with art by Marcos and Rich Buckler for this Marvel UK black-and-white.



express his ideas across to the artists in a gentle but stern manner. I always respected him, he was very enthusiastic and he was always there to listen to our ideas. I felt comfortable at the Marvel offices. It reminded me of the newspaper and magazine environments that I had worked in before, both in Peru and Mexico. And this made me feel very much at home."

CH: After your debut at Warren, you worked extensively for Marvel as both a penciller and inker on a whole range of different titles, from superheroes to horror to sword & sorcery. Did you have a preferred genre to illustrate?
PM: "Sol Brodsky preferred that I work on characters with a lot of muscles, such as Conan, and really give it a scary twist while focusing on his extreme masculinity. As a matter of fact, I still enjoy working with heroes that portray fantasy and horror. Actually, many of my commissioned artworks lie within these requested perimeters. And yet I also liked to do pencil and inking with the superheroes that Marvel and DC assigned me to do. Much work for titles like *The Avengers*, *Marvel Two-In-One* and *Thor* for Marvel, and *Batman*, *Man-Bat*, *Teen Titans* and *Star Trek* for DC Comics. These assignments were a good excuse for me to draw freely and do what I enjoyed best – and that is illustrating. I could not conceive of doing anything else. Basically, I feel that I have had many opportunities to work with many different genres over the years as a comic book artist, and I feel very content with that."

CH: In the '70s, your name was synonymous with much of the work seen in Marvel's expanded line of black-and-white horror magazines: *Monsters Unleashed*, *Dracula Lives*, *Vampire Tales* and, most notably, *Tales Of The Zombie* from 1973 to 1975. You drew all but one of the main stories in this title, defining the character Simon Garth along with writer Steve Gerber.
PM: "I worked on Steve's *Zombie* scripts after the second issue and on every other one until the end of the series. Steve was a great writer and an extraordinary person. He was also very content with the way I developed the adventures of Simon Garth. We worked together well and had great communication with one another. Many times we revised the characters and plot at the last minute and then I proceeded to illustrate them. I only have fond memories of the great person Steve Gerber was. My favourite adventure I drew for *Tales Of The Zombie* was from #6 and it was called 'Child Of Darkness'. One of my personal favourite images from the series was the third page of issue #5. A few years ago I was pleasantly surprised to see that it was an exhibit at the San Francisco Museum."

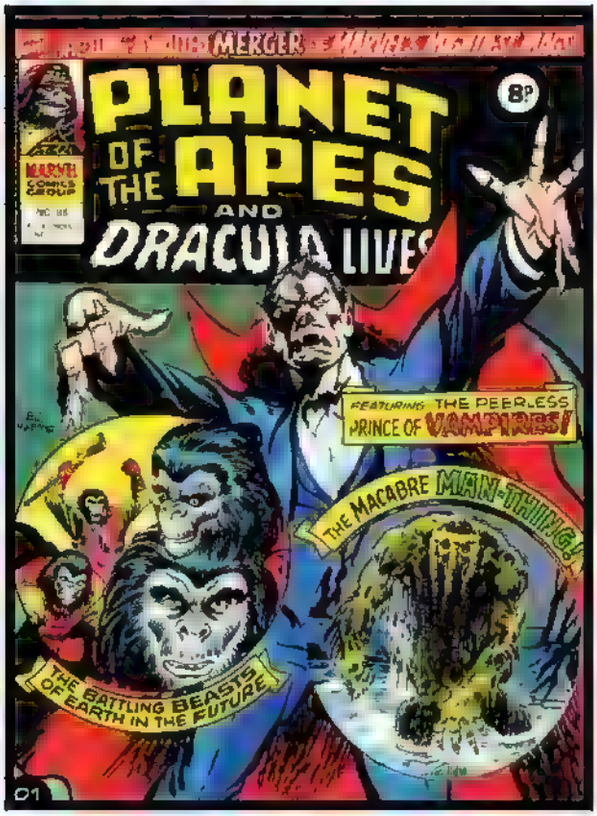
CH: Today, zombies are everywhere in the pop culture landscape and extremely visible in comics, movies and on television...
PM: "Yes, and I really do not comprehend why zombies are so culturally popular these days. I am not happy with the portrayal of today's zombies, which is very different: violent and bloody. The zombies that Steve and I depicted rose from the dead looking for justice, and were vigilantes (protectors) of the swamps."

CH: Your other signature character from the black-and-white magazine line was, of course, Conan the Barbarian. You drew many strips for the *Savage Sword Of Conan* but also produced many more pages inking John Buscema's pencils and, in a lot of cases, his layouts. Did you enjoy working with "Big John" and on *Conan* in general?
PM: "Well, working with John was different, in a way that was not commonly seen back in those days. He would give me very precise pencilled sketches that I could easily finish before the inking process. Many times the sketching was so well structured that I could go straight to the inking. When I did the pencilling, I did many details so that when it came time for the inking part it could be done quickly. *Conan* and other such fantasy based adventure is definitely the type of work I love to do. I enjoy drawing the muscles (anatomy), beautiful women, strange animals and I can really submerge myself into the history and origins of these adventures.

"I guess I would have to say that I consider Roy Thomas to be the best collaboration I've ever enjoyed with a writer. He and »

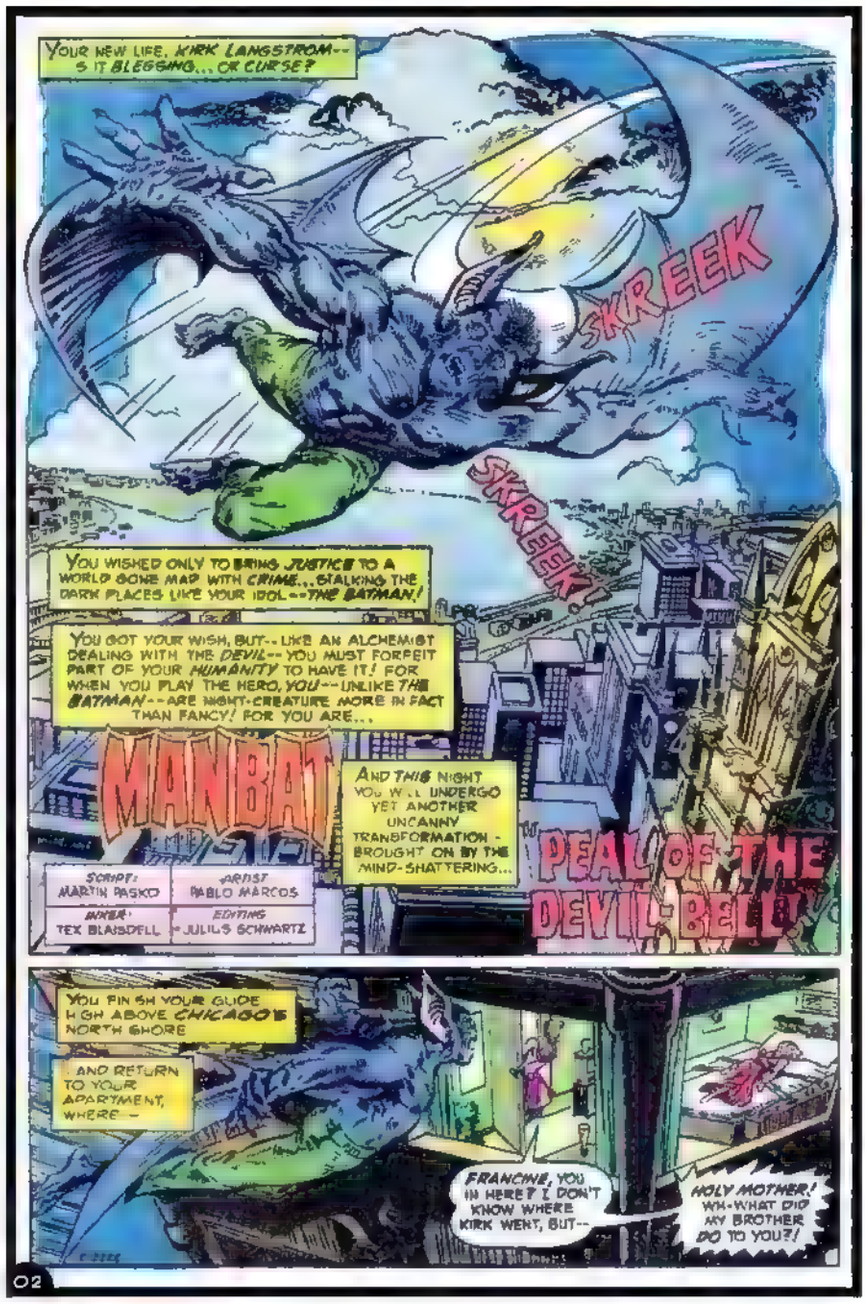
01 ***Planet Of The Apes & Dracula Lives*, Jun 1976**

Marcos's realistic illustrative style – not dissimilar to Neal Adams – became a mainstay of Marvel's horror magazines.



02 ***Detective Comics* #458, Apr 1976**

Marcos pencils and cartoonist Tex Blaisdell inks on this two-part Man-Bat back-up tale.


YOUR NEW LIFE, KIRK LANGSTROM--IS IT BLESSING...OR CURSE?
SKREEK
SKREEK!
YOU WISHED ONLY TO BRING JUSTICE TO A WORLD GONE MAD WITH CRIME...STALKING THE DARK PLACES LIKE YOUR IDOL--THE BATMAN!
YOU GOT YOUR WISH, BUT--LIKE AN ALCHEMIST DEALING WITH THE DEVIL--YOU MUST FORFEIT PART OF YOUR HUMANITY TO HAVE IT! FOR WHEN YOU PLAY THE HERO, YOU--UNLIKE THE BATMAN--ARE NIGHT-CREATURE MORE IN FACT THAN FANCY! FOR YOU ARE...
MANBAT
AND THIS NIGHT YOU WILL UNDERGO YET ANOTHER UNCANNY TRANSFORMATION - BROUGHT ON BY THE MIND-SHATTERING...
PEAL OF THE DEVIL-BELL!
SCRIPT: MARTIN PASKO
ARTIST: PABLO MARCOS
INKER: TEX BLAISDELL
EDITING: JULIUS SCHWARTZ
YOU FINISH YOUR GLIDE HIGH ABOVE CHICAGO'S NORTH SHORE
AND RETURN TO YOUR APARTMENT, WHERE--
FRANCINE, YOU IN HERE? I DON'T KNOW WHERE KIRK WENT, BUT--
HOLY MOTHER! WH-WHAT DID MY BROTHER DO TO YOU?!
02

I worked well together. He'd usually send me the synopsis of an adventure, and I got to develop it from there. I really enjoyed working with him on *Conan* and on *Red Sonja*, especially on a tale called 'The Monster Island' "

CH: During the '70s you were incredibly prolific in producing art for Marvel UK, especially many covers for a variety of weekly titles.

PM: "Yes, I worked on over 100 covers for the Marvel UK line, under the direction of Larry Lieber. I was producing four covers a month at that time, in addition to some interior pages. I drew many for *Planet Of The Apes* and *Captain Britain*. I especially recall the cover that showed Captain Britain attacking The Queen! I really enjoyed working on the covers for the *Dracula* series the most "

CH: That's a lot of covers in addition to the work you were doing for Marvel US at the same time. What is your daily output speed for comic pages?

PM: "Well, back then, I was able to ink a 45-page issue in a week. Of course, that was while working on it for 12–14 hours daily! On a regular 32-page comic issue, where it involved pencilling and inking, it used to take me about a day per page. But now, the work I get commissioned has no real time limits.

'Now, I wake up very early and go for long walks in the beautiful surroundings of the Andes with my wonderful wife Myriam. I spend many hours in my studio, alternating between drawing, painting, reading and navigating the internet. Then I finally love to sit and watch some soccer games, which I can now watch through and through, as opposed to the past, when I could only see the goals and special plays."

> ***The presentation of comics is increasingly fascinating***

CH: Do you ink with pen or brush?

PM: "I use a brush a lot for the inking, it is so much more versatile and agile when I can emphasise dramatically the lines. But I always use the inking pen that produces a fine line also, to do the detailed work. Actually, today many companies are asking for a very tidy pencil output, to enable them to go straight to colour. But in my own work I do both pencil and ink. I like to conserve the line and, in most cases, I set the lines over the colour in the art to be printed "

CH: I've seen some of your painted work and it looks superb. Do you enjoy working in this medium?

PM: "Painting takes a lot of time, and sometimes I give myself the luxury of doing it. Paint was always a plan I had for when I retired, when deadlines were history. I still love linework, and I enjoy adding colour to my work so as to compliment it. Doing manual colour is so easy and it comes natural to me. Yet I need to keep up with the times and I am receiving classes on digital colouring. It is very important to me that the new applications can be added to my creations "

CH: With such a resumé of work to chose from, what do you consider to be your absolute finest?

PM: "To date, the work I consider my best – although most people haven't seen it – is one of my own creations called *Ramses*. Almost 30 years ago, I illustrated a cover image of *Ramses* and I liked the way it showed the essence of the character. Marvel and DC both wanted to publish it at the time, but it would have been incorporated into their existing superhero

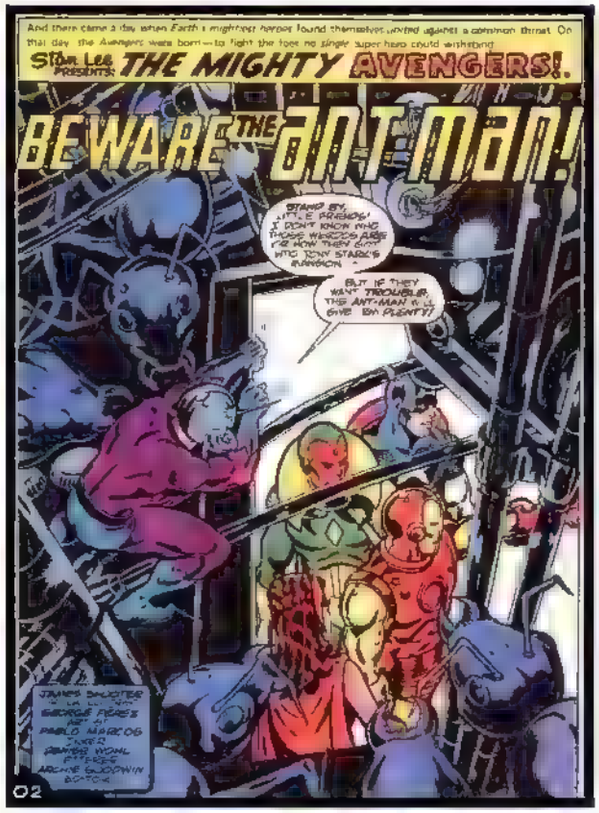
TELL ME ABOUT THE BARBARIAN MARIANNE! WHY HAS NO ONE EVER TOLD ME THAT I HAVE A BROTHER? AND WHY DOES HE WEAR HIS IRON JAW?
OF THE IRONJAW I KNOW NOTHING, MILADY!
BUT IF MILADY SWEARS TO KEEP WHAT I TELL A SOLEMN SECRET FROM THE KING, I WILL TELL WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE SAVAGE YOU CALL IRONJAW!
GO ON, THEN!
"YOUR REAL FATHER WAS A WISE AND GOOD KING. HIS CONSORT, THE QUEEN, YOUR MOTHER, GAVE BIRTH TO TWIN OFFSPRING: A BOY AND A GIRL. THE GIRL, ELENA, WAS YOU. THE BOY, ROLAND, WAS THE ONE YOU NOW CALL IRONJAW...
ROLAND WILL BE WISE AND A GREAT FIGHTER! WHEN I AM TOO OLD TO GOVERN, HE WILL RULE THIS LAND IN MY STEAD!
YES, MY HUSBAND!
"BUT THE QUEEN HAD AN ADMIRER WHO COURTED HER SECRETLY BEHIND YOUR FATHER'S BACK...
"SOON AFTERWARD, DURING A HUNT, YOUR FATHER WAS THROWN FROM HIS HORSE AND BROKE HIS NECK. THEY CALLED YOUR FATHER'S DEATH AN ACCIDENT, BUT IT WAS RUMORED THAT A PALACE GROOM LATER DISCOVERED A TINY METAL SPIKE PLANTED BENEATH THE DEAD KING'S SADDLE...
01

01 *Ironjaw* #2, 1975

Michael Fleisher and Marcos gave Conan-alike Ironjaw a pretty twisted backstory

02&3 *The Mighty Avengers* #161, July 1977

Marcos returned to Marvel after Atlas/Seaboard Comics folded to do art for issues of *The Mighty Avengers*; here he's inking over George Pérez


STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!
BEWARE THE ANT-MAN!
STAND BY, LITTLE PARSONS! I DON'T KNOW WHO THOSE VILLAINS ARE OR HOW THEY GOT INTO TONY STARK'S MANSION...
BUT IF THEY WANT TROUBLE, THE ANT-MAN'LL GIVE 'EM PLENTY!
02

—PUNCTUATED BY SUDDEN HELL!
BLAM!
BOOM OUT!
YOU GAPE AT ME—YET YOU ARE SILENT AVENGERS!
AS THERE NOT ONE AMONG YOU WHO DARE SPEAK THE NAME OF—ULTRON!?
YOU THOUGHT ME DESTROYED, YE THAT IT'S FOOLS!
AT LEAST THREE OF YOU—CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE VISION AND WONDER MAN—HAVE RETURNED FROM SEEMING DEATH!
03

universes. I did not want to do this to my character. I preferred that it be a superhero on its own... an independent character. Over the years there have been other companies that were interested in publishing, but there are still things that I need to work out with my character, Ramses. Hopefully, one day, it will be seen!"

CH: **By the 2000s, your studio produced Waldman Publishing's *Great Illustrated Classics* (*Three Musketeers*, *Gulliver's Travels*, etc); easy-to-read, heavily illustrated large print editions aimed at young adults. Did you enjoy the diversity of adapting these literary classics and were there any in particular that you enjoyed drawing?**

PM: "Yes, I illustrated over 50 literary classics for Universal. But *The Jungle Book* was one of my absolute favourites to work on. In the years that followed, in 1999, I also worked for *Soccer Jr Magazine*, and I illustrated legendary sports figures, including the famous soccer player Pelé. I also worked with Sports Illustrated Kids on a series called *Legends*. Here I was able to illustrate other historical sports legends such as Babe Ruth, Muhammad Ali, Joe Namath, and many more. Some of that work can be found in The National Soccer Hall of Fame, in upstate New York."

CH: **So what are you doing today; do you still get asked to do regular work within the industry?**

PM: "I have continued working with different companies on non-continuous projects, such as a collectible card series by Rittenhouse, *Spider* for Moonstone, and 12 pages for *Jungle Tales Of Tarzan* for Sequential Pulp Comics. I have also been contracted by the Edgar Rice Burroughs Estate to work alongside Roy Thomas on one of his great creations entitled *Red Hawk Vs The Moon Men*. And with the same company I will also sign a contract in the coming days to draw *The Land That Time Forgot*, with scripts from my friend Martin Powell, and *Tarzan Of The Apes*, again with scripts by Roy Thomas. All these ERB contracts are for the next five years."

CH: **How do you see the future of the printed comic, come the digital revolution?**

PM: "The world is an ever-evolving civilisation that is continuously changing. Since the caveman era, man has changed according to advances in science. Many things have been created due to this evolution, such as electricity, the telephone, and now the digital world. Logically, the comic industry has gone through a huge change. The presentation of comics is increasingly fascinating. The colour spectrum available now is very broad. This change will continue and I am not totally opposed to the digital movement. I seem to have found a good balance incorporating my illustrations into this new medium. It is not easy to predict how the comic book will be years ahead from now. But I think that the magic of the comic 'in hand' will continue, even if they are available in a digital format." CH

Pablo is still doing commissions – despite his many other assignments. You can contact him at pablomarcosart.com

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BIG ISSUES

THE HANDS OF SHANG CHI, MASTER OF KUNG FU #29 | STORY "THE CRYSTAL CONNECTION" | **BY** DOUG MOENCH & PAUL GULACY | **DATE** 1975

"Fists Of Fury Versus Slashing Swords Of Death"

Shang Chi was created when Marvel wanted a slice of chop-socky pie. But then, suddenly, it all went a bit James Bond. By James Lovegrove

The '70s kung fu craze reached its apogee with Bruce Lee's final film, *Enter The Dragon*. Released in 1973, it was a massive worldwide hit. At around the same time the TV series *Kung Fu* was riding high in the ratings with its irresistible mixture of Wild West setting, Zen philosophy and chop-socky butt-kicking.

Marvel, never slow to act when there was a bandwagon passing by, leapt aboard with *Shang Chi, Master Of Kung Fu*, a comic book based on the books of Sax Rohmer about the son of a dastardly Oriental criminal mastermind Fu Manchu, who is raised as a living weapon in order to destroy his father's enemies. Shang Chi, however, develops a conscience after he kills Dr Petrie, the books' narrator, and has his eyes opened to the truth about his dad.

The strip debuted in #15 of *Special Marvel Edition* and took over as the title feature just two issues later. Under various writers and artists, the series meandered. There was plenty of martial arts mayhem, with Shang Chi pitted against knights in armour, a samurai warrior, dacoits, street thugs, Fu Manchu's Si-Fan assassins, and even Marvel's own Man-Thing. There just wasn't much focus.

That all changed when Doug Moench took the reins as permanent scripter and Paul Gulacy became the more or less regular penciller. Gulacy had contributed art to the early issues, but the inking had been unsympathetic and his style had yet to crystallise. He was terrific on design, layout and action, but his anatomy was often dodgy and he seemed to have great trouble getting faces right.

Moench soon jettisoned the Fu Manchu angle almost entirely and settled on a new tone which owed more than a little to James Bond. The cover of #29, drawn by Gil Kane, has the tagline "The Rampage Of Razor-Fist!", but the story title inside "The Crystal Connection", couldn't be more Bondian if it tried.

The tale opens with Nayland Smith despatching Shang Chi – along with Smith's thuggish aide de camp Black Jack Tarr and a recent addition to the cast list, suave super-spy Clive Reston – to infiltrate the lair of a heroin-smuggling drug lord who rejoices in the wonderfully ludicrous name of Carlton Velcro. Velcro's fortress-like headquarters would make Blofeld strangle his Persian cat in envy. It has a pit full of black panthers, lots of leggy swimsuited lovelies, and numerous henchmen including the aforementioned Razor-Fist, whose lower arms have been replaced with sword blades.

It quickly becomes apparent that the heroin business is just a front. In fact, Velcro is a megalomaniac would-be world conqueror with nuclear armageddon on his mind, and his base is ultimately destroyed in an explosive showdown during which Shang Chi goes up against Pavane, a whip-wielding blonde dominatrix in leather waistcoat and bikini briefs. That's after a beautifully choreographed six-page fight sequence between Shang Chi and Razor-Fist in #30 where Gulacy truly comes into his own, staging the action with precision and flair. With his mentor Dan Adkins providing the inks, *Master Of Kung Fu* had never looked slicker or cooler.

Moench's script for #29 and subsequent issues played the Bond angle for all it was worth, with Clive Reston dropping none-too-subtle hints about his parentage: "Anyway, as my father was wont to say, live and let live – or die, as the case may be." (Later it would be revealed that he was a descendant of Sherlock Holmes as well!) Gulacy even gave him a passing resemblance to Sean Connery, while in some panels Shang Chi looks not unlike Lee.

"The Crystal Connection" found both creators setting up concepts and plotlines that would serve them well for the remainder of a high-quality run. Gulacy quit with #51 but Moench continued up until #122. The comic was cancelled just three issues after that. No one else, it seemed, could make the kung fu/spy-fi formula work quite so adroitly. CH

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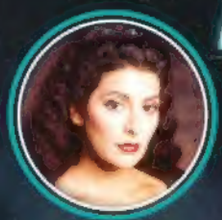

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